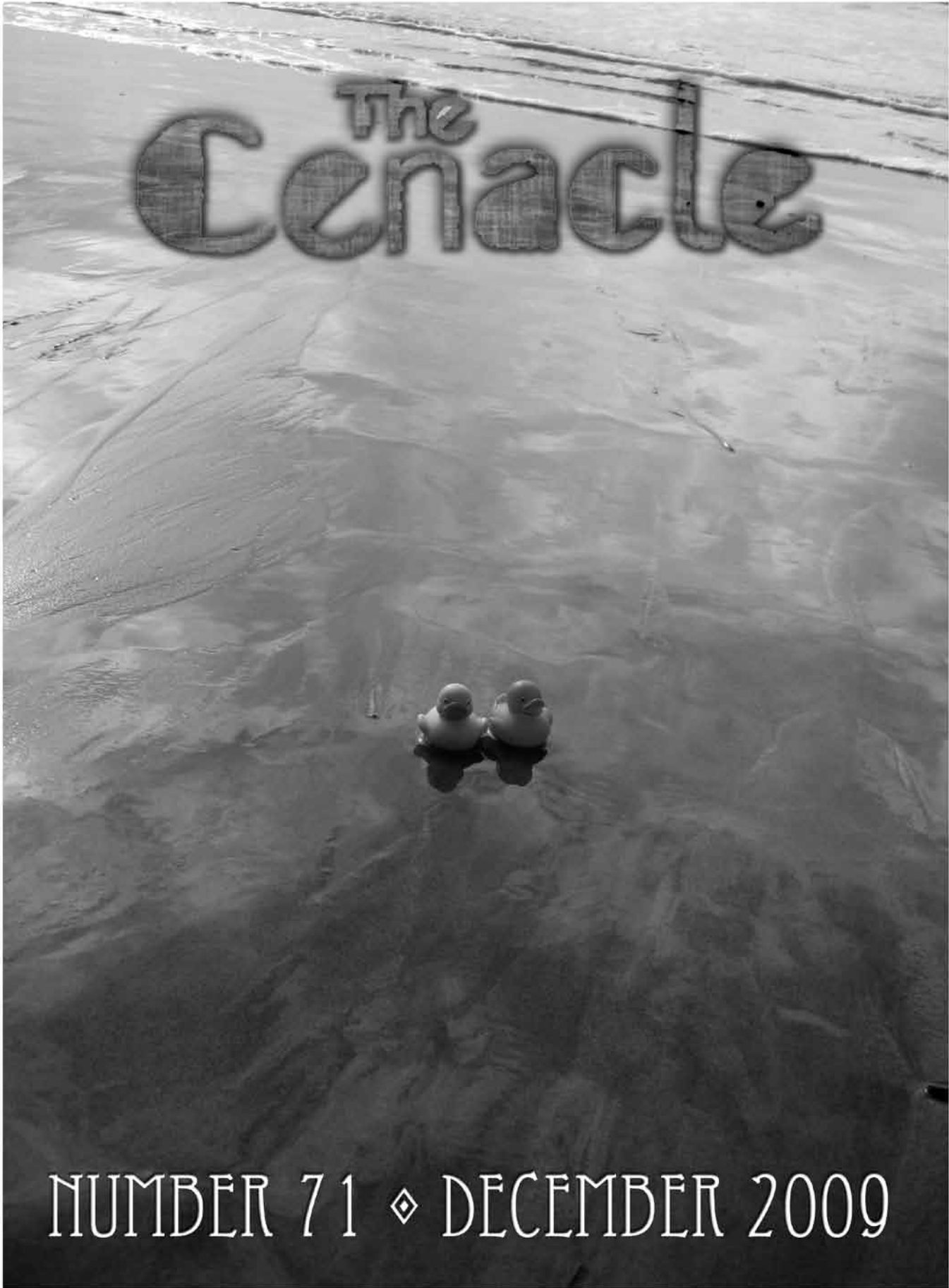
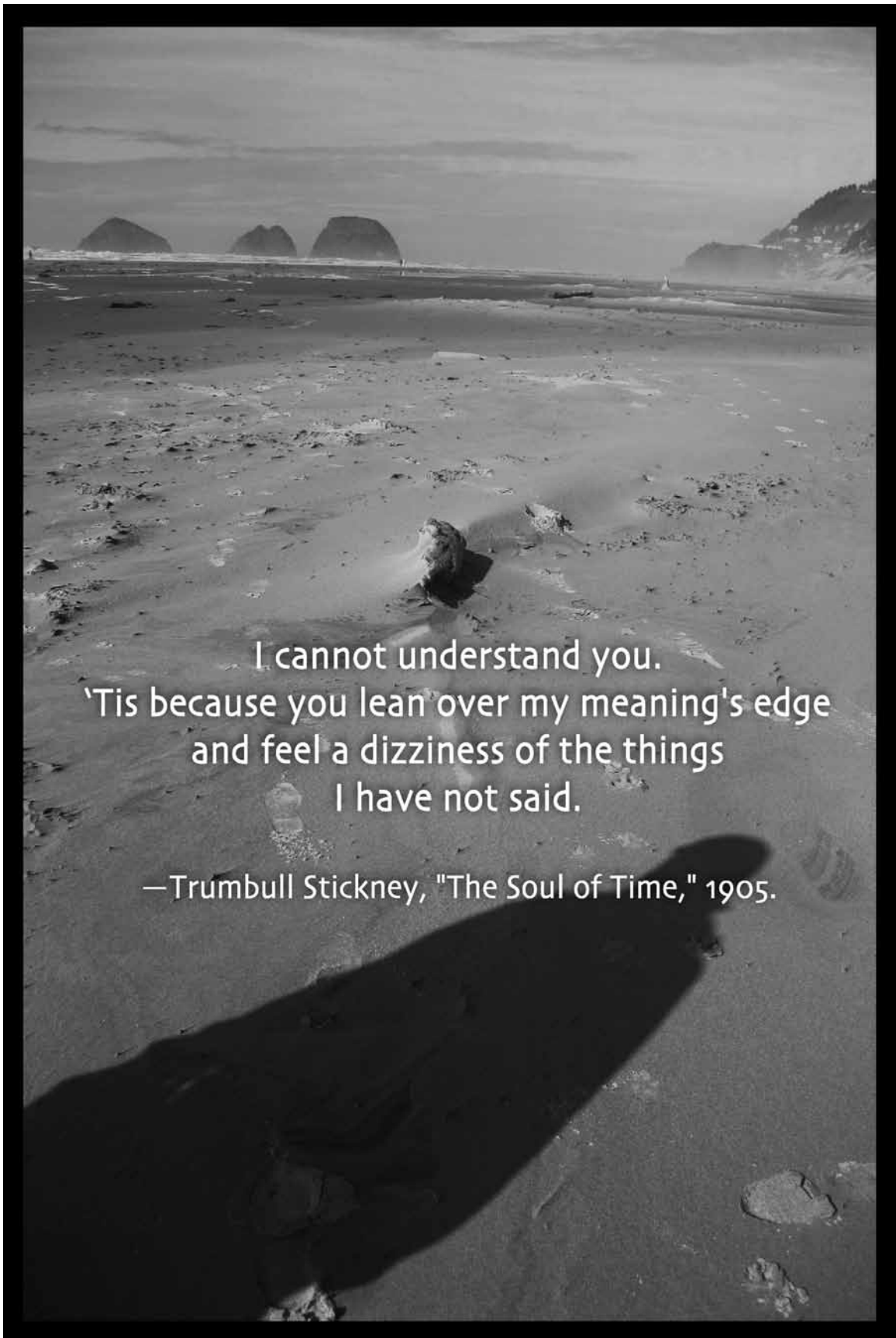


A black and white photograph of a beach. The top half shows the shoreline with waves washing onto the sand. The middle section is a wide expanse of wet sand, reflecting the sky. In the lower-middle part, two small ducks are standing close together in a shallow pool of water. The bottom of the image contains text.

The Cenacle

NUMBER 71 ♦ DECEMBER 2009



I cannot understand you.
'Tis because you lean over my meaning's edge
and feel a dizziness of the things
I have not said.

—Trumbull Stickney, "The Soul of Time," 1905.

December 17, 2009
12:52 p.m.
Hilton Hotel - lounge
Portland, Oregon

I woke this morning realizing that the current decade is nearly over, two weeks from over. Not a lot of fanfare over this - It's been a dark, tiring time & still. Wars large & small go on. The planet is still in ecological peril. Millions & millions are poor & sick, die in pain, die alone. Countless sit in prison for smoking the leaves of a benign plant. Someone, many someones, are plotting to harm you, take something from you, figure how to fool you into giving it away. Fat cats are purring louder. The human hustle goes ever on.

Nobody knew ten years ago what was to come. There were fears of dependence on technology, skepticism of the helping hand of government. Those days, those years of the late 1990s bear a kind of lazy innocence to them in retrospect.

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view. Perhaps the current tumults will appear apple-cheeked smiling one day sooner or later.

Then. Now. Hence. Nothing is as it seems. Someone is always plotting what next, how bombing that building, or stealing that election, or abducting that girl, or evicting that family, or one way or another limiting the choice of another will result in tasty victory. New leaders ever emerge, & their followers coalesce.

One of the hardest questions about this world, both ~~that~~ broad in its scope & profoundly applicable is, simply:

"Are we, as human beings, evolving?"

This question breeds crazy once it's given attention. Evolving toward what? At different rates? Constantly, by fits & starts, sometimes devolving too? Is there an end-point, an arrival?

Accepting, or allowing for, the idea of human evolution can profoundly affect

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one's life, the history of one's culture,
the direction of the world itself.

One looks back & sees a from &
imagines forward to. A road, a path.
Days of progress, others of stall.

Feeling good on a given night, hopeful,
one says to another in conversation,
"Well, Houston just elected a gay mayor,
the first openly gay mayor of a major
American city. And Washington D.C.'s
City Council passed a measure legalizing
gay marriage. Oh, & the Obama admin-
istration isn't going to prosecute in
states that allow medical marijuana!"

But the reply could easily be,
"But the Congress is too bought-&-sold
to pass universal healthcare. And
our war in Afghanistan is expanding.
And how many regions of the world are
just this side of nuclear war?"

What I come back to is a strange
feeling of hope, not despair, in the
unknown times ahead. The future is
an infinite feast of possibilities, great
ones & tragic ones, & I do not believe

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that anyone has taken sure control of this feast. That said, the idea of evolution cannot help but be a messy, sometimes incoherent thing. The feast of the future covers the world, & not every dish is sweet. Some dishes are empty, some bear poisons. Some dishes are larger than others.

But your place at the feast? Mine? None can say beyond this moment, this never fully knowable now. Whether or not the world's constant movement is synonymous with evolution, or not quite, the world is constantly moving. Look back to December 1999 & none can say otherwise.

Scripter Press has certainly evolved in the past ten years. Ten years ago I still lived in the Boston area, was still in graduate school, had little use of or knowledge of computers though I had worked in a computer book store & taken classes in desktop publishing.

It was during this decade that I came

JB-

to see, & to embrace, the great potentials coming to pass. I still do my most meaningful writing, like this, with a black pen & lined paper, yet I know that these words may one day soon be ~~read~~ read online by someone in a physically distant part of the world. That I can scan this page, integrate it into an electronic copy of this journal, & upload it to a server where others can "visit" to obtain a copy. Too, that some of these farflung souls might one day become friends & contribute work to this journal, & receive in the mail a print copy produced in my home.

Some of the words in this journal have & will be heard on my radio show, broadcast around the world. Electronic transmission of words, images, & sounds has become commonplace. I call this an evolution in my life & that of billions of others on the planet. A victory on the path.

And yet. And yet.

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And yet still the world is in peril.
Still many sit in prisons. Still the
poor, still the sick. Still the purr
of fat cat & a million schemes
underway to control the flow of
evolution, to own the future.

I don't believe we will ever
"evolve" out of these kinds of con-
flicts. Who can marry whom. Who
deserves to heal with best care.

I believe the human impulse to
know & do is too complex & malleable
to chain to a way, a single truth.

I even think that we've survived as
a species this long because of the
fluidity in our beings.

What I cannot say, what none can
say, is whether what has gotten us here
will ever carry us along. Our preachers,
our presidents, our poets, our madmen,
our purring fat cats do not know.

Maybe this is reason to smile in this
Season of Lights. Nobody knows what's to come
better than you or I do. There's still a chance.
The feast is raging on.

12-17-2009



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Assistant Editor: Kassandra Soulard

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Thank you to S Corp. for giving us some much needed solid ground in these shifting times . . . thank you to Barack Obama for coming through your first year as leader, despite your bumps & bruises, with your head still held high . . . & thank you, one & all, to the many writers, artists, & DJs who contributed to Scriptor Press & SpiritPlants Radio in 2009 . . . here’s to much more Art to come in 2010!

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Two.

*"The most beautiful thing
in our world is fire"*
—Aldous Huxley, quoting Plotinus.

A room that becomes more, I don't know how to tell, it relates poorly to hours, to linear time, to the simpler mathematics of dimensional space, but untroubled, so untroubled this room that it remains solid while there is otherwise passage, change, no explain how so

where closest to touch each other, here, this room, this seems the best there will be, each will brush the others, glance off, notice & shift, breathe & allow, this room, its walls of fire, its ceiling of stars, its floor of moonlight, its couch of silver melody, its bed of blue light & red gold—

Would the greater disappointment lie in the world letting down your hopes or your fears?

xxxviii. / i.

Again the feeling of sudden arrival, the blind accounting for flesh's safety, she's nude this time & bedded & there is breathing near her ear, sleep's breathing, steady & distant, & there is a smell, light but sharp, & she knows it to be her own sex smell mingled with another's, but the mix is not familiar . . . exactly—

She tries to sort the jumbled hours in her mind, each a hungry pet for her best attention, & she can't do it immediately—

Slow . . . slow . . . I'm in a bed, I'm naked, I fucked someone, we slept, I woke, he hasn't yet, if a he, but I think so, women don't smell that powerful to me. We fucked & slept together in this bed, big enough that we are not crowded too close, & by the way we aren't crowded too close, not twined, not like the Renoir statue at the Tate Modern, more something of a Hopper, was it good? Was he? Was I? I never know beforehand if I'll be good, sometimes I lose it, the rhythm, it's like not being able to sleep, but he's still here, he's sleeping, he didn't leave me no matter how bad I was—

Who is it? Why does he smell familiar? How did I get here?

Tricking herself by not thinking clearly for a moment she opens her eyes & cries out before she can stop herself—

Fuck. Shit! *Fuck*.

I didn't want it to be him. I knew it & I didn't want it.

Now what?

I wait. Try to breathe slowly & deeply. Memories are still trash through my mind's stream but OK.

I think about something he said a long time ago, when there were still a lot of us following him, when everyone got along, when there was hope & mystery enough to propel us together.

We were camping in a strange desolate place, but the moon was near full & the air was coolly sweet.

He caught everyone's attention for a moment after dinner. Suddenly we were all turned toward him, stopped from our doings.

He smiled somewhere, as he would do. Quiet; we waited.

Finally he said, "No waiting. No yearn. Tis arrival." Nodded, & left it at that.

I got so fucking wasted that night. Woke up at dawn, naked & stained.

He wasn't always mojo guru. I'm so *fucking glad* he wasn't. He liked throwing around a Frisbee, sometimes he was clumsy as hell, but once in awhile he leaped to make a catch like one of those big graceful dogs you see on TV, flying for a moment & you don't breathe so excited—

The bed is getting heavier—is that possible? I feel it slowly weighing down. Time to be brave, darling. Open em up. Now.

It's not him! Shit! What the fuck is that? Did I fuck that?

Wait, no. It's OK, it's him. Not really OK but what the fuck? It was bigger than any man, hairy like a bear, horns?

He moves around & sleeps again. Is it him? Was I that good? What did we do? How many times?

That's your dirty mind talking. Evil eyes will check out anything with a twitchy ass. Boy, girl, hell maybe I did fuck a man-beast! Me turn down Bigfoot? Not unless he had issues with shyness & flaccidity. Maybe not even then.

Are my clothes around? Can I get up & dressed without bothering him? Do I want to? Some men take one look in the morning & their cocks lead the way back in. So to speak. Get lucky their tongues go first.

OK, so I don't know. I feel stupid waiting for him to decide, to wake up even. I very softly feel around my thighs, not wet, of course. Not bruised, at least by touch. Hell, maybe we—

"We did. For hours."

xxxix. / ii.

The film is called *Remoteland* & some say its origins trace to a cancelled cult TV show & its lunatic fans. What happened with that show was a tragedy & the chance that this new film is related pretty much dooms its success. A few will go to see it, hoping for more lurid themes, but it will likely close in a month or less. Art-films are like this, they have a moment's scrutiny & catch or don't. Doubtful this one will.

Remoteland is long & what's worse is that several versions are released. Too many complications for most movie critics who skim the press packet & write up dismissive reviews without seeing it. They call it "hopelessly obscure" & "relentlessly dark," an "overlong derivative slop" that, "doomed to its alleged associations, stands no chance of art-house much less mainstream success."

But *Remoteland* doesn't close in every theater right away. A small audience is present every screening, weekday & weekend, it hangs on, one could even say it digs in, not many see it but they see it over & over, they buy buckets of popcorn they eat little of, they're polite, & a little scary—

Word spreads that here's something special not hardly close to the cultural radar, many theaters schedule midnight screenings & they nearly sell out occasionally. It's creepy, the same faces so often, even taking the same seats, but they bring in a piece of change—

So just another *Donnie Darko* or *Waking Life*? *A Wall or Song Remains the Same*? *Eraserhead*, maybe.

The latter, maybe, a likewise obsessive film with an obsessive audience. Polite, though. None cause any trouble. Many theaters rake in the little piles of green & assume it won't last. Nothing does.

But a feeling like: which theater showing it will burn down first? Where will the first murder take place? How long til whatever this is proves to be a super scary zombie cult sex initiation drug ritual awaiting the right full moon for total massacre? How long?

It doesn't happen, nothing bad at all happens for a very long stretch. Some settle for calling it the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* for even *weirder* kids.

Seems this will be enough. Nobody fully believes this, but seems true month after month.

Of course they won't tell, nobody's business but ours, & we don't really know what's going on, just that one guy who freaked & nobody knows what happened to him—

But it's ours & we know what they do with secret things—they think *TripTown* ended cause it was cancelled? Cancelled?

But that guy, what happened was scary. I mean, we keep track the best we can. Not in a cult way or a government spook way, but just to make sure things are cool. This is something special we share, it's important—

They try to explain it like a movie or a TV show but it's really more like following Phish or the Dead back in the day. That's the closest anyone can say. I mean it's strange but that's what it's like. You belong to something, it affects you, you see what it was like. TV shows & movies are passive, you sit & watch, maybe together, maybe you talk about it after, but nothing you do directly affects the experience while it's happening. It's recorded. You watch.

With music everyone affects what's happening, the band feels the night, the vibe, the

hall or venue. They play live. Unexpected shit happens.

It's like that. Not Johnny Carson either. Way more like the Dead, if the Dead was like a TV show or a film but doing what they do.

I mean, the more I try to say the worse I do. You're thinking it's like a play on TV or something, Shakespeare, but no, man, it's not.

It's like if you could get something back from long ago, some secret, special thing you had, it got lost, it got stolen, you put it away, then that too. You recover it, whatever it was, & you catch up on things, & your friend is back, your friend matters again, your life fills in something empty with this new feeling but it's connected to an old one you had & lost, like its child, they look alike but it's exciting again—new & exciting but there you are, not a child, just connected & new, fuck! Why do I try to tell anyone anything? Leave me alone. I don't know shit about it.

xl. / iii.

Bowie finds an old bike at the farm, village, something, to where they've brought him. Nobody owns it, & when he takes the time to repair it, nobody impedes how he takes possession.

Replaces the tires & tubes, both long worn out. Brakes are OK, chain worn but good with oiling. The gears all work. The frame is solid, old & solid, this bike is no light-weight new flyer.

Fine, neither is he. Takes possession & works to make this bike run again, cares for this task, ignores so many questions, for the moment.

If he can have this, a little easier dealing with the rest. Not sure why.

At first when the girl comes around, smiling, he smiles too, & fucks her in the back of the barn workshop he's in. She likes it, he can tell, a happy lover gives hints, what she expects, what she wants most. He realizes that she, or her lovers, or both, are fairly inexperienced. Too much press for something spiritual here, a rebuke of flesh's needs, discipline flesh, punish it. He reaches for her orgasms deliberately, & she cries, then reaches further, & she moans. Then gentles, & she snarls. Lets her press for it, need it, bark for it. There, good. When she recedes one time, with a smile, he nods. More ground, less open sea. Call it the shores of sex. Leave it at that.

Then he realizes she likes watching him fix the bike. He's not great with tools but he finds a great old book on home repairs & makes do with a few pages. She watches. OK then.

He gets up morning very early, leaves her sleeping, clever fuck that he is, he kept her up very late fucking, taught her how to suck cock like the best cathouse madame—

she resisted a little, at first, but he's broken & re-trained more challenging students—

arms locked around her, cock hard & positioned at an angle between her thighs he whispers, between long deep breathing silences, "it's part of the game, part of how it's done"—"I know how horny I make you, nod"—"*Nod!*"—"And right now you feel what you want almost where you want it. Nod."—"Nod!"—"but you see performance is all & nothing is beyond the borders, shift a little—a bit more"—his cock now kissing lightly her wet wet pussy lips—"& so we learn to perform—it's how it is"—"nod"—"now lick your lips"

he made it difficult on her, having learned years back from a real whore one of the deep secrets of good fucking—cock control—really good cock control—she goes down on him tentatively til he barks—then she devotes her lips & tongue to her task—he pushes her off twice & fucks her very hard—without cumming while she loses count—

the third time, seeing she's exhausted, he sighs & blows, so much, so unexpected, she nearly chokes—but hangs on—swallows—all of it—he orders her to cum while she's swallowing & she comes close to passing out—

so her lovely fucked form isn't going to wake easily just a couple of hours later—

he wonders if anyone else will stop his ride—he'd told her the night before the bike was nearly ready—nearly—figured someone was listening—

Not sure in truth if he'll come back—has no possessions—looks at the girl &—fuck—nearly doesn't go—

her face is petal-soft & puppy-open in the muddled pre-dawn light—her body belongs to him—which is nice, very nice—but something else—her expressions—her smile—he really didn't come here very willing—if not for her he would have already found a way out—probably more violent than re-building a bike—

he'd delayed—& not because anyone else here had tried to engage him—or explain the place—was he supposed to ask “what kind of cult is this? God, drugs, sex, guns?” Little had been offered up—they'd willingly given him the girl—another set of circumstances & people would not have—& perhaps she was seen by others too as the hook—better than God, drugs, & heartless blindfold fucks—

Wobbly, the road is dirt & climbs very slowly up & up, he guesses the direction as nothing either way clues him—even tire tracks are confusing—decides to ride unhurried, if someone gives chase he'll stop—nobody's compelled him to stay but he doesn't own this bike—& he *has* eaten their finest pussy—

Cracking up softly he pedals & the commune of farm buildings falls away. Untilled brown plains, little cover, easy to see & be seen if anyone was trying—

Leaving another beautiful girl, eh, Bowie? This one even tight & untaught to your specs! & why? Answer that.

He can't, doesn't want to. Riding gets harder & harder as the road climbs. He pushes himself, wills his tired legs to act on the crisis at hand. The hill becomes ridiculously steep. His balance wobbles badly. Something like relief in the stone scattering noise of the pick-up nearing him.

xli. / iv.

Samantha & I walked for miles that first night, singing like we did when I was a child, wordless hums, I want to stop & just listen to her but when I do her voice thins & I can't hear what I wanted, I know my voice isn't the difference but still—

I don't remember what we talked about years ago but I do remember that I told Samantha everything in my small heart & she listened with care—she'd hug me when I was done & then tell me in few words something comforting—I think she mostly told me to not see the whole world in a moment of sadness—she seemed again just a bit older than me—now

again, when we finally sit & rest—I talk she listens—

When I mention the White Woods, she stiffens, nearly sniffs the air like a small, frightened creature—

“I think it burnt down, all of it—”

“Did it?”

I sit back, silent. Truth is, “I don’t know. I was groggy for a long time & then I found myself with Jamie. I don’t know how we met.”

Samantha smiles at the campfire we’ve built—“you left him to begin to know again”—

“Do I want to? Is it that bad that I would blank it all out?”

She says nothing. I don’t know where we are but it’s clear I need to sleep & she doesn’t. She cradles me & as I fall asleep I hear her beautiful voice unfettered by my own

*world in evolution
world in ferment
world in a deep boil
cleaning every soul’s grime*

*world a hope when armor
heeds heart
world breaks down & we
cannot defy this*

*world a secret night when
several hands clasp the moon
world when the tired let go
in dream & elsewhere—
let go in dream & elsewhere—*

She moves us along with speed, with purpose. I finally ask where we are going.

“I’m bringing you to the next place” she says, simply, like that explains it well.

I want to say more but catch myself, Samantha never liked questions when she’d told all she cared to. So we walk & my mind looses some, I don’t think it used to, but it does, & I walk through an inner mist, trying to figure my life before I met Jamie—& why him? What about him woke me up this much?

He was a contrast to something, to someone. I should know who & I don’t.

Samantha is stopped. “Too much, Maya. Let it come back. Let it be like the tide.”

“What’s wrong with me? Why don’t I remember my own life?”

She is silent.

“Are you going to help me? Where are we going?” I stare back at her. I don’t flinch. I’m not a child.

Her face softens. “You were in the White Woods.”

“I don’t know what that is.”

She starts walking again. I follow because I don’t know what else to do yet.

“Tomorrow” she croons, when she lets us stop again so I can sleep.

*World when the tired let go
in dream & elsewhere—*

This time I don't fall from the music but with the music through sleep, fall through dream & elsewhere—leave Samantha behind, hoping I'll see her again, know I will in some form or another—

Open my eyes to a feeling of fast-moving. Car . . . a bus? Greyhound bus? Across the aisle . . . I don't want to look . . . empty. He's not there yet. Look out the window . . . He's standing with a man, smiling, his friend, seeing him off.

No time, no thought, I grab my things shove into bag & leap toward the rear of the bus, the three-seat row next to the bathroom. I crouch near the window, knowing he's getting on & that last time I looked at him, & talked to him, & so many things came after because I did, & why not this time?

Why did Samantha send me back here? What am I supposed to do?

I sit still, light-headed, wobbling. I don't know & I don't know. I don't know.

He's sitting there & I love him & I don't believe this. He's near again. Would he remember me? Does this return give me back what I still had that day when I met him, when he looked at me & I thought I felt Samantha near me, he felt like Samantha.

I move over a bit & angle my view to spy him. Wait. He's close! Neither of us in the seats we were in the first time!

His hand leans into the aisle & I hurt. Samantha! Samantha.

xlii. / v.

I walk the bridge of glass for hours, maybe days, maybe not, this was my choice, I'm not sure how it became the best option, how I ended up in that room over the S & G Pizza, but I did & truthfully it's OK—I wasn't doing much before that—

So I walk steady, not very fast in case it gets weird again—walk & walk, if I'm dead at least I'm not lying stupidly in a box—

Snap, flash, I'm a kid again at my granpa's funeral. Shit. Fine.

But I'm not small. I haven't shrunk. I'm at his funeral but still grown up. They gave him a full church funeral, one I'm sure he would have hated.

"God's a last resort, Sonny boy. Remember that. Might not work either. Your best bet when all's lost is to punt, run, or go out with what fists & fury you have left." He'd said the last few words so angrily they didn't fit with this benign service full of platitudes & dislocation—

I wasn't at his funeral.

Where was I? Don't remember. How old? Don't know. This looks like it though. Did anyone tell me the details? How long til I found out from when it happened?

People look at me casually so I must be visible. I don't see anybody I know at first. Why didn't I come? Why would I have missed this?

How do I know it's him from the back of the room?

Shit, kid, gather your marbles a minute.

I feel myself fading out, but no, fuck, I pull myself back in, insist, whatever's king of me right now brought me here, I'm going to stay here awhile.

“No!” I wrench back in & the bridge fades, the church solids up & I’m there. Alright then.

I start to walk toward him, in his casket, up there. Not believing, not knowing anything. But OK, do this for him.

The pews either side the aisle fall away some, I let them, none of this matters but what’s ahead, I walk slowly, it’s OK, granpa, I want to do this, I want to see you—

Then he recedes too & I get angry—

“There’s got to be rules to this!” I shout. “You can pull me through every deep & ugly hour of my life but you have to let me stay & deal with them! You can’t fucking tease me like this!” I stop. The receding stops. He’s still up there.

So I’m let this close & no more. OK. I’ll take it.

I look around. I don’t see anyone I know. No family, no relatives. No friends. Is it really him up there? Was I brought to the wrong delusion?

I try to remember sharply & suddenly: I don’t remember what he looked like. I remember his voice, his words. His face? His body? His shoes or clothes? His height?

Why do I think it’s him? I was thinking about my funeral, about being dead in a box, or lucky not to be in the box at least. Then I was here.

think. Whatever world this is, it seems to be mine. My memories, my loved ones. That seems the border, if it’s even valid.

Maybe I’m not ready for this? For who’s up in that box? Flash & I’m back on the bridge of glass, remembering that service but no longer there.

What now? I stop my steps. See nothing around me, greyness, a waiting for me, a still. I wait too, I still. Begin to trace back . . .

Why the S & G? Why bring me there? What was I before coming there & after?

After’s easy. I went clean. It was bad, I sweated & bled & shouted my way free. Eventually the demons loosened, & receded. They don’t go away completely, but I pushed them off enough to breathe, to pick up my shit & get along.

I was quieter. The world & I didn’t battle in frenzy every fucking hour. There was a . . . lessening . . . some of it was good, I was alive, some of it no, I was duller. A nice slouch.

Before S & G? I was a lunatic. Didn’t even have a steady address for some years. I traded buddies dope for couch space, when I wasn’t fucking my female clients. My harem of soft weedies.

I moved to the S & G because someone I wouldn’t call a friend managed it, offered me living space for steady grass. I took the offer & regretted it. I’d owned nothing for years & realized it was the trade-off for my . . . what? my life & damn the consequences. Can’t catch what doesn’t stick around. No address, no phone number.

None of this sums to shit yet. Who’s fucking with me? I can’t know or believe anything right now—

xliii. / vi.

Was it future, dream, fancy, I don't call it one or other for several together don't sum it either. Try this version:

through a dream I sat at a computer console, I was thinking about a rock show, not one I'd been at, & this was a show years ago, but I began looking for it & at first I found it & then I was walking to it & then I was dancing near the stage & I awoke & an end to that, except these lines many hours later written freshly & perhaps read freshly some week or other year & so I think less casually on this, it has traveled already, to wish to see a show & eventually walk into it & live it & return perhaps, calling those hours at that show, this morning, tonight, those years ago, what exactly then?

A faith in evolution, a faith in God, in either or none?

If anything, find God in the exceptions. In the miracles. In the unexpected. Find God in every sure grand great idea proven one place's caged look at things. If God, between the bars, looking in & out, & the bars themselves. The prison, the guards, & those who plot escape. God is the escape, especially. The thrust out.

God not the rule but the rule's final break, freedom in the stench a broken rule farts out—a cosmos kept orderly grows dank, begins to stink with boredom, with decay—

Find God most fiercely where creation's ways are deduced, adored, & annihilated. Where the drumbeat collapses, the flail, every drummer waiting who will catch something to follow, waiting,

Nothing I've seen or experienced convinces me that order is God's prime rule, if God there be—I believe ferment is deepest good, chaos, from which music, from which desire, from which art comes hot & a fearsome danger, & fuck all else, fuck what settles, what knows & is assured, what plans for all, what strokes want like a trusted pet—

creaturely sweetness in a soft bed with a murmuring companion & the drifting moonlight air, all well, settled & vague, far off the clash, far off the bloodier hours, now dream, & even that slowly, call this year & others to come for rest, for prosperity, words become poison when the next known, & the next, art becomes shit when it's solid & plays to the beat, art becomes shit when it knows what it is & what's next & here's how, here's where & how much, this, & this—

fuck it. God in the moment's revolution at hand, it what may explode your heart & mind, & no more.

I can only intend this work to slide through the rest, catching at each, carrying them, folding & stretching at them, what they are singly & crushed together, a thousand pages for one fresh rivulet, if need be—

if need be—

which seems that all old work is to the service of new, reverence to it, what came, & here's kindling to what's arriving now—

nothing lost, nothing recovered.

Sentiment adored & crushed to a powder for trailing back, for remembering, returning, letting go, & again, & again,

because nothing ever goes & nothing returns.

What my part in this book? Angry, restless, melancholy, unsettled, & staying that way for now, this has to go somewhere new or fuck it—is that deeper the past or some other potent ruin? I picture a book eventually set in caves, in guttural shadows, in colors when one ink won't do, in pictures when the last of the words isn't strange enough—

xliv. / vii.

Set it to paper & it lives bright now & on with the rest, a wish to push along now, let in the blood, let in the microchips, let in five kinds of webs & a mountain rumbling within & below—

Somewhere always a confessing heart here—somewhere how life does not explain & changes too fast & little assures, & hard to frame the mew for aid much less which direction to arc this cry

Sweetness, please, hours like sugar cubes, what's swept into a moment's eye never going, never gone

Remember everything but in a shadowy, smoldering hill—

Only the freak in things bites hard enough to matter, the voice, the book, the song, the face, much walks the plain, sups it hours sweet & foul, fades, gone, feeds the soil, fades, all but gone, only the freak in thing stays, legend, myth, warning, promise, mystery, way—

What then? Toward the freak in things, what does not slide easily from & to—

What protests the stay & suffering—what—

what—

what—

Feel what present in this book, what far, dim, an arcing fist, great one, long spit of fire, feel it, not yet a sense of we, is there a we anymore, I wonder tonight, I look about for the we in things & I see clumps, knots of we, I don't see eager immolating pushes to we, strands hurrying, scatter seems truer, isolation the clarity when clarity is sought—

What will bring we then, even in a book like this, an obscure bit I keep near for my pleasure & push,

what brings nearest kindness, is it suffering? The empathy of shared suffering? Is that some of the true, if not all?

Suffering brings strands toward we but will it stay? I don't think so. I don't think suffering alone can hold we together perpetually, what then—

what—

what—

I've often found the lone night a comfort, sometimes nigh to an explanation—my music, these

pages, these years of pages, more like hundreds of nights of pages,

a push toward we, toward nights when a bonfire looms & bodies tend nearer, toward light,
brilliant hours when two hands enfold a third dearly—

The classical labyrinth brings its visitor to its center by the longest, most circuitous way, & a single way at that, no choice but inevitability—some say the first labyrinth imprisoned a beast who fed on young flesh, who was kept caged & fed to conceal his lineage, & then none escaped his devour because the Labyrinth was deceptive, was filled with visual tricks & mental incapacitants—that one man made it through aided by a golden thread & slew the beast—& returned alive as none others had—& broke the heart of his thread-gifter—& broke his father's heart late—& if this is the origin of the labyrinth then it begins bloody deep in betrayal & murder & deception & heartbreak & cruelty—even later pilgrims could at best call it a life's hard path to God—

I can only say that I walk my life's Labyrinth not to reach its center or to slay its imprisoned beast but to follow its golden thread of music through the many nights—I don't know why these others walk theirs nor if possible to see & know that each walks the path of all—

We simply seems the worst wish to clasp—yet clasp it I do as much as the lone nights & pen & music's disappearing gesture to follow & follow & follow—

xliv. / viii.

A touch & all melts, words on a page but direction to come too, a wonder at how, but say this true, a feeling about endings, transformations thereafter, resurrections the promise, not a single man to his crowd, but the world to worlds, what passes there is meaning, there is memory, there is return

Tonight to believe in every possibility, hold open to hope again, let its foolish wings in, tonight to hunger cleanly & forgive both, to pick up from dull distracted pages & push along new, memories not a shackle, nor a damnation, & cry Universe let the youthful hours sea-burnt in full moonlight flow more bluntly, let those hours their resuming mystery, conjure a conduit back, through years some a shit-hole, through them all, let those hours thrive new, Universe, so much isn't lost yet, none can say otherwise, there were secret worlds then, in hand, & now too, are they kin & what say otherwise, a touch & all melts, to the last remain of glance

Everything remains, in scatters, little deny, little solve, yet it all remains

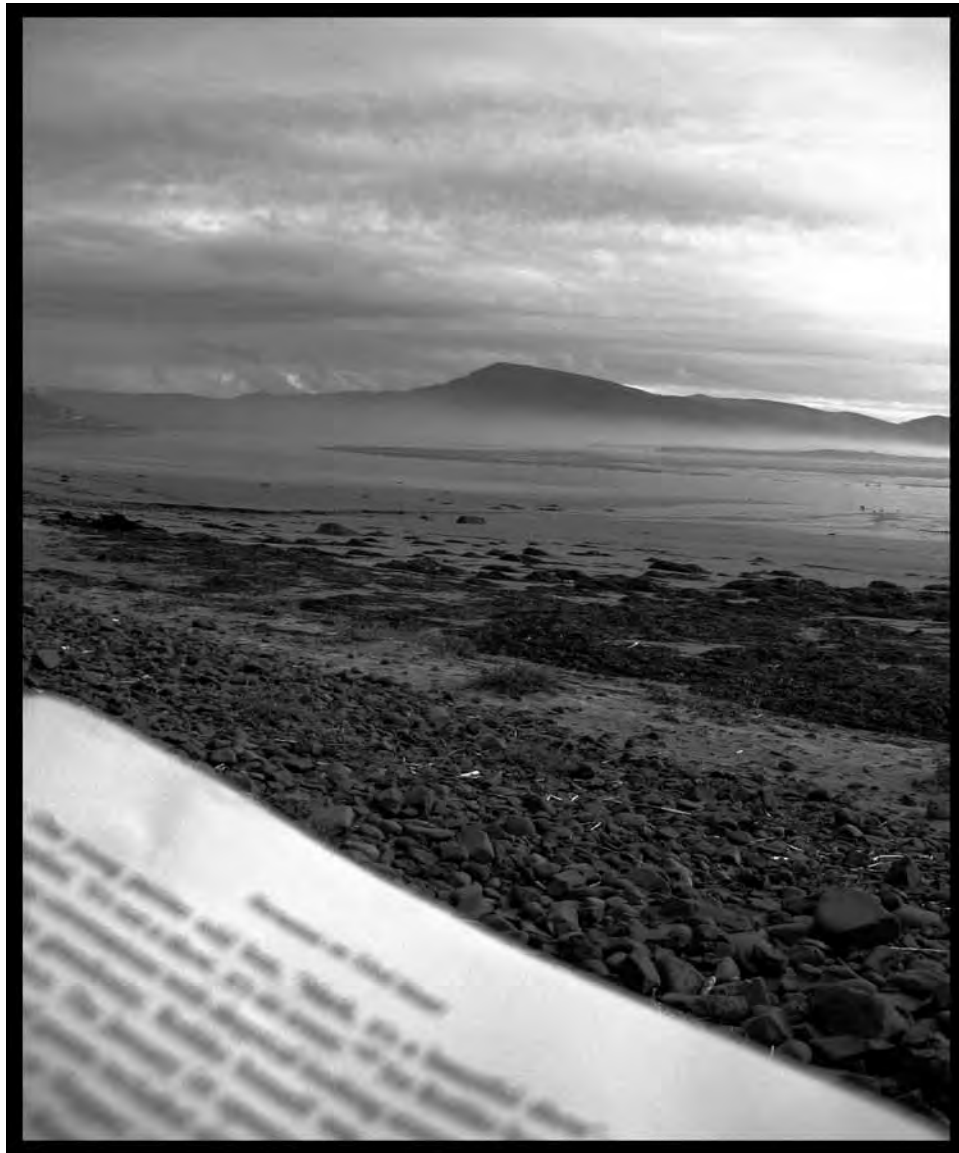
xlvi. / ix.

Come the velvet blindness of music, the fall to stars upon stars, each player looks up & sees a torrid light corrode the sky, from a window, from a tree, each sees this right now, these players their hearts blown through the velvet blindness of music,

do you know you're players?

does that make this book a game?

how will you respond to knowing?



is there a game-master? is there
a goal? What the rules, what
the penalties?

How deep the game, to love, to death, to dreams, to desire's nameless raw?

Are we all in this game? Is this pen a gaming instrument, this page a recording? How
to score points, how to psych an advantage?

Does the game end? Did it begin?
Is it wending the Labyrinth or,
sharper, noting the game's book is
called not Labyrinth but Labyrinthine?

Will it hurt? Will I bleed? Do
I win by endurance, can I lose
if I forsake my hope & skills?

xlvi. / x.

The way is called Dis-illusion & perhaps the game is too, if the game is the way, or the
way the game so I take me to another year & find my old courtyard table tonight, autumnal
Cambridge & I sit here for a few moments & write the following rules

Everything is possible
Anything is likely
Regret best fuels a pause
Hope is good traction to act
Want stays, its food infinitely varies
What should happen often doesn't

having written these I suck on the beauty of this conjured moment, the guitar player on the
sidewalk, the cobblestones toward other places, the newsstand, the light in different voices, this
gaming raises not a lash, & fade off, return is likely, return is possible

played out

a new round

xlvi. / xi.

Having passed through the thinnest, the awful passages when it seemed little was
coming to put some covering on what's beneath, dress in roses, in winds, in starlight, in a
crowd's turn for music, in its sigh & pause,

it's a game, a game
as big as a game &

yet, a game, time + play

you're listening now but soon the world will lure you along & the naked lattice here, there few
pages, little, little, & less—

submerge, will re-appear
in dreams spilling into
daylight, in wants you
carry countless miles—

in what remains you a child & onward, how you call back & forth

the way is Dis-illusion
the game is Dis-illusion
breaching time space is
Dis-illusion

new round!

new round!

new round!!

xlix. / xiii.

We meet, we part, we remember.
A moment at a street corner, two hands,
an hour under stars, it was long music,
a night riding tavern's wilds with brothers.
Remember & wish, call it time.
Clocks like manacles, by digit, by tick,
the best hours were unmeasured & are
unnamed & will be beastly strange.
Feel our flesh among flesh, call it space.
The lie of limited dimensions, near & far,
all is here, tonight, now, forever, not
the comfort in this, little croon.
Sleep, dream, some accelerated life, return.
What to bring back, what dream-fruit to
seed, what dream wish to continue chasing?
This is return. Morning the foul yawn.
More should spray lights into being,
more should come like virgins, & again.
This is home. Some other year, another home.
Snails & their slime. Humans mark time
& location by regret, by sentiment for
someone's dust. Some yearn, some
adore, & what next? Meet, part, remember.
Time, space. Useless gaming tools, discard

them now. What remains? A few
cupped hours will not break. A goatskin
sack of them, useless. Useless.

The shine, so near between day
& night. Trains arriving. Harbor
shadows. What fades & returns.

Let nothing go. Wear every last old wish & demand it of your heart, what you were, regard,
what fades & returns by heart's inmost will. Remember everything until the common & the
fluted hour both kin up near & warmly—

l. / xiii.

Hunger roars the mind & loins alike, call it resistance to the dust, & little plays it
out long, hunger blind & encompassing, like a tall man-god, full of blood vengeance for a
moment's disregard, & though an unclustered burst sates an hour, sate is not ease, & hunger
insists the universe—

She closes her eyes, feels the expensive red wine soften & blur, feels something giddy
bubble in her, down her neck, tap-tap her tummy, swish around her thighs, feels spritely too &
wishes to follow when a hand not quite soft or deft prods at her clothes, & she remembers, my
new lover, my first lover, I think, the world has shrunk & I don't remember things I should, I
wish to—

it's nice to be touched, & she moved smoothly to instruct his practiced, unknown
fingers, him watching her closely for a facial nod or nay, was this when I started to hate him?
These fingers of his that had touched other women & learned nothing, become arrogant
not humble? Was this when I began to tangle him in conflicting responses, muddy him into
chasing what he held rather than sharing the truth of desire's hard grip & harder release?

Saddle it with suck & bones, strafe with stroke & suck, she learns quickly, he likes his
knob slobbered, that's OK, her fingers tongue & mouth lock like a jazz trio around a really good
run deep inside a night's long melody, then she adds coo & light breath, his cock interests her
more in her hands' or lips' grip than her pussy's, sometimes he wants tight cunt when she wants
chocolate & solitude, & some deep compromise in the place where sexual body & erotic mind
cross forge agreement that she will suck his cock beggingly good on those nights, steer him
near then away, make delicious drinking sounds when it roars out & weakly pours out, let him
think he's treating her no less, on those nights in other places & crossings within her, her pussy
says reach higher, her heart says reach higher, dry pussy despite her live skills, untouched heart
despite his gifts of red flower & black panties—

—reach higher, when human happiness lies in loving the bars, endless singing their
song, what was fun to him devolved to cocaine throttled fucking over the S & G—Maya looks
through his window, sees his life, sees his memories splattered a millions colored shadows on
the wall, & all he's lost, & what he has left, plain & golden—

hunger unites strangers
divides others——

Call it love, inmost petals open to another's light, I loved Penelope, there was no doubt, for
awhile, & she loved me, loved me so much I had a choice, her or blow, & I hated this because

I called it love & it so mattered & when it ended something bigger was over, something ugly he'd won, it wasn't the coke or even 'Stina, who didn't love me, it was all my worst fears about the world, how it was, how you get one golden fucking chance & that's that, & worse, you can blow it on purpose, you do, *you fucking do*

why? what did I want

someone says:

desire, sweet douseless wish

& I say fuck *you* & fuck *that*, now I'm dead I can't have Penny back, I can't shave my ragged soul pink & bare, clean my every inch, crawl to her, crawl for her, I could have, that's the fucking thing, there was a crack of hope left that night she found 'Stina tonsils-deep on my cock, I could have let her rage & diminish, miss me, curse me, still miss me, & maybe agree to something slight if I turned my ocean up & around, emptied it of nearly everything, agreed to a dozen mind tinkers & love detanglers—

I didn't—I was broken

Eventually 'Stina was gone too & I did check in to a counseling program—the coke let me go because there wasn't much left to cling to—

I submitted to the highest power I could conceive. Despair.

Whatever it was, that bang behind my head, & wake up at the S & G, it didn't steal me from much, I keep thinking I'm happier here, I can't even compare now

But I do miss Penelope more now that I'm not such a numbed lip—

Murmuring path elsewhere, call it death, new restless, next sate, we thought we were twins, convinced of it, & she died on me & nobody told me why, & I was confused because at first they told me she was on a trip & I kept asking where? Where is she? Why did she go without me? She wouldn't do that! Where is she? Where did she go?

They explained it eventually but I never quite believed it. She was on a trip, she'd gone without me, they'd made her, I wanted to find her, we belonged together

I told him, years later, I'd told nobody but I told him, & I cried, & he let me, I *bawled*, & he let me, then I felt better & he smiled & nodded—

he talked about blood & consequence, he talked about the bitter things & the sweet ones we each keep to ourselves, & the others we share, the ones we tell to forge open borders with those we love—

"Why? Why some not all?"

"I don't know. Maybe people like a few secrets. Maybe it's fear of telling any one person everything—& then losing that person. Maybe secrets tie us to our dreams so we need a few to ensure this bond"

"Dreams?"

He nodded. "Nobody can explain them any better than secrets. Maybe they're related."

I could have gone on & dear lord on with him but a knock & a phone call & less than a minute later I was walking down the street—

Where is she? Why did she go without me?

I got older & I looked but her family had suddenly moved & nobody knew to where. I researched, learned about computers & the Internet so I could research her

—& fuck a variety of strangers online late at night—the two became connected endeavors—

I began to wonder if we really had been twins—was it possible? I had to know—my parents were dead—only my brother & he was younger than me—but he'd stayed close with them—lived in their town—inherited the family scrapbooks—we hadn't talked in years when I went to see him—no phone call or letter—a plane flight, a rental car, an address I hoped was still his—

I needed to know if my Penny was real, if she was still alive, if she remembered me—& I met him on that trip—

They say *Remoteland* in every single version but possibly one begins with a close-up of a finger, one color or another, & the tiny square of paper on its tip—in most versions the square has writing on it, but some versions have images, & in one version it is plain white—the exception to this motif is the one that begins with a car burning in reverse—from conflagration to impact to high-speed acceleration to something else—the arguments about the first few frames of film are unresolved—

The night he went with his friends, the last of his light bulb nights, he was driven to the cinema in a car which resembled exactly the car in the film—but his friends did not notice or think much of it when he told them—

“It the same car!”

“Maybe similar”

“No. Down to the dent in your hood & the crack in your windshield!”

“How did you see all that? Wasn't it on screen for like two seconds?”

He didn't answer, he couldn't, he would have to had admitted it was well more than two seconds, that in truth he had experienced that crash over & over in his life & what he saw on screen had haunted him waking & dreaming for years—& always the same quiet song sung by a desolate girl—

*Are the years too many?
Are the years too few?
The years are perfect, don't you know
by every creature's wake & grow?*

—so he said nothing—too far gone already—

So was the square of paper a dose of LSD? What was printed on it? Why variations on one opening, & then another with a completely different opening?

He knew it was coming & mourned a little, when the movie resumed & he found that he was again watching what everyone else was—

“Charlie?”

“Charlie!”

“Charlie Pigeonfoot!”

“Stay with us. You'll be OK! This time you'll be fine, Charlie!”

She doesn't scold when he returns & he explains nothing. They let him keep his bike as now he knows it won't help him escape. If he's a prisoner.

He does nothing. Eats little. Seeps into himself, a little deeper, a little deeper, they can corral & chain him but nothing short of physical brutality will rouse him.

He hears them try to take the girl away & says nothing. She remains. He reaches deeper. Lets go & reaches deeper.

I was a little happy then. I had something & I was a little happy.

He wants to see Gretta's face, it's become a blur of dimmed emotion & old sentiment. Now he struggles to recall it, will her presence, will it here, will it now.

A bit more, a bit more. Less day & night. Less waking & dreaming. Into the murk, the undetermined, the place beyond clocks & kings,

he will not speak now, does not appear awake, works with an obsessed will through his sense of self, of distinguishable individuality, closer, barely breathing, barely beating, more, less, let it go, let it go, let it go,

what falls away does so slowly, then less so, his integrated sense of self & reality, losing coherence, losing control

Now near, now nearing, now a spark, a flake,

Gretta	I'm falling	catch
me	catch this thing	what's left
		catch

The hand moving ink wills a wash across souls & places, one color's shadow to touch another, several stray musics to suck through one instrument into many musics, awareness to clash brightly with awareness, there will be hours when you have to collaborate, when your lives will uphold each other,

this true, & fear, & the tides, & little else—

moments when you will all be joined & share a nameless one will—

what this book if not to conjure one world & change another

What belief enough but that many worlds cross inexplicably, their sparks more countless than every star ever seen?

No explanation to the Universe but this: no explanation. Chasing knowing in another's eye or a book or a beautiful chemical combustion does not arrive one anywhere complete & clear but simply somewhere else, next, novel, old, sentiment, pleasure, illusion, ego, forest, memory, spasm

Explanation of anything fails—

What else then?

What else, indeed

li. / xiv.

No frenzy greater than a body in love, blood fierces through cotton & wool, warms the day too, light sucks back in, deeply, light in worded drops from out there, whatever world there be, feel it, want ripples the air, closes the space, blinds all other sensations,

No dis-illusion possible those long, few hours when the world frames a glance, when nothing can be but this twining truth, every dirty lone hour & wrenching kneel given to this arrival, this stay, glory in simply resting near & here,

deeper than a child's the greed for what beloved bears, a sealing the gaps, a naming the shadows, the song of life now plain, beautiful, & eternal,

what bloom noticed, brushed, what pinks each cheek, what word? what word? Will this hour go ever on? Will the world bend near its perfection & soften & learn?

What did that one mean? And that one?

Breathe, crazy one.

A dream, sweat & crushed, wake up, young, old, thick wallet, poor, wake up alone, paired, more, when there is one clouding your heart, there is one, there is falling, there is music, there is hurting beauty in dusky parks & long highways—

There is the ache—

No other, no other

I was you, tonight, that ache in you, in your mirror, in your bath, in your bed. I was you, I knew, I was close, what did that word mean? & that one? I was you & blurry conversations, serving for a dollar, both arms of books & how much they don't know!

Later, mourn frenzy gone, nights when stars bit with Beauty & mystery, when a human monster pressing on every side but & yet

No other. No other.

What word, what word?

Behold a body in love, a heart's whole valley framed in a glance, sheered by a touch,

Now lighter, & lesser, now what is, is. Now the sure step of waking, its rules of rise & fall, its light mock of crescendo & decay

The moon never knew, neither cards nor coins, never knew & yet I called, you call! We call together. Bodies in love, we call together. We dive for that true strand, that answer, that magick, beloved, & hurry hurry home.

lii. / xv.

What shift between the bones & metal of a moment, the sky's strange seeming hunger for this hour, this place, the weird will increase here page by page, know it, page by page, know it, page by page,

know it, page

by page,

know,

it,

who returns not who left, quite, strong fancies between, the scald of regret & sorrow,

so when he uses cuffs & whispers moan, good, now a little more
 when the bus jogs hard you & he collide, his hands briefly, obviously grope beneath
 your blouse,
 when you see her, playing, playing well, sweat from you earlier & more later on,
 page by page, know it,
 when the movie becomes wildly violent in & between theaters, when many are hurt
 (page by page, know it)
 when what happens at the S & G is far more spectral than it was, when it seems some
 cosmic crossroad, when creatures in danger shelter there, when you know now what all this shit
 meant,
 page by page weirder
 (know) it (page) (by) (page)

A moment, sweet holy crash, slave some years to it, is that what's common here? Is it the chasm between labyrinth & labyrinthine? The one a noun, the other adjective, the one an object, some sort, the other a descriptive state, how to breach or change what you are?

Remember a turning face, a devouring scent, like bread & diamonds, what means any of it, where the perch or perspective to see down toward it, across it, beyond it, through it, tell me, preachers, tell me, gurus kings great heroes humble walkers, a holder of dear photograph, a laced torso the heated pink dream inside my nightmares tell me tell me o tell me

Wounds pale, blood within strides on, memory's discordant fruit falls, a thousand years ago, a thousand thousand, tonight, ever, where the velvet gowns & the chandeliers of candlelight, where the pale pink pills smooth into the funky thump cries, now more, feel it go, wider eyed view, feel it, nothing explains, nothing stays, nothing gone, a bitch shifting twine moving one here past another two touch three others immolate—

Seeds, new nights of pushing, bright noise, clinking cheer, taverns cement blunt the liquor drunk & break something within, tease the secret demons,

twining heats like a truth released—

The reedy voice is gone. The dusky catch of salmon sky along that path, lone rides to lost houses, what empty fingers cried to moony stars. Old silences, great untamed wilds, brilliant vanquished dust—

What the many nights, what more they didn't, the crowds moved forward & drank the sound, the moment complexer, the sky heavy & low, faces washed faces with want & joy,

the reedy voice is gone yet a heart listens, a memory insists. the dusky salmon sky when lightning struck through a rainbow,

nothing explains. liii. / xvi. nothing explains,
 entering the bookstore at dusky salmon hour I saw the
 candles spell smoke upon the ceiling

SEA BURN SKIN &
 LIII/XVI SLEPT ALL NIGHT
 full moonlight & I leaned to the sill
 many questions,
 many questions,
 young, still, who loves me? Who likes me?
 WILL I BE HAPPY SOMEDAY?

"remote land" changes so much outsiders think a sequel
 has come out & nobody can explain it otherwise but
 how has this happened?

Bowie wonders if he can get hold of a gun. Once he knew guns, maybe loved them, wait, did he? He tries to remember. Someone walks in on him fucking the girl, her gagged, arms bound & hanging from a hook, clothes raked off where he wants touch, pushed aside

there seems threat they will remove her but they don't—he wonders if she asked to stay—he doesn't press to know—

She loves him or more likely comes hard so often this resembles love to her how could someone who makes her feel like this not be her lover?

Maya whispers I don't know much about boys Dylan says just fucking pose

We lean now together
 he & I
 tender each other.

she sits with the other wives while he preaches, tries to remember if this how it was before, what before, was there a before, he throws violet balls of flame at the chapel walls til they crack & collapse & the night fills their eyes & hearts

what then? where will I go? what the fuck is my name

'Stina & I are poor but we live in golden liv. happiness xvii. above the S & G Pizza, so many come & go & we comfort, we advise, we protect,

the war nearing, more empty hands

We look for what glances close between faces, & elsewhere. She says we are keepers, guardians. More rooms every day here, she says, & I see it's true. & there out there the bridge of glass where you walk to try to find your way back here, she says, but I see no bridge of glass, just a neon sign—

lv. / xviii.

Watch it near & away, what the world next offers, what next it will take away
The night is plain with mystery,
I don't know how other to say.
Fixtion more toward the mystery than resolution, ever,
go slow, let it—

Hunger, human world, hunger still.
Coins, more, less, hunger still.
Touch, near, nearer, hunger still.

Everything ends, shift, shift again,
I've felt the beauty over & over,
become music on a tall, tall starry
night. Become a soft cheek, a
clear eye, lingual spark between
fingertips

near, nearer, hunger still. Shift,
shift again, a scent, a fenceless
path, up toward a full moon's frenzied
lean, into a bent idea called God

the hotel bed has coarse coverings beneath her back, & Dylan's hands are rough, more than they need be, he's said nothing, doesn't even undress her just claws her jeans & underwear down & climbs over her

she doesn't resist, this isn't how it happened, it was sweetness, he was beautiful, this shoving

man above her isn't him

isn't him isn't him isn't him

"I thought you liked it this way, baby" he moans, isn't him, isn't him, "come on, let me know" isn't him isn't him

his face dull & focused with lust—
isn't him. Jamie. Trying to please
her. When? When did he try to tak
her in a budget hotel room?

"Get off of me!" she pushes him, he pushes back til her knee connects hard with his cock. Hard.

Now he's on the floor. Won't yell in pain. Too much.

"Who the fuck are you?"

"I'm—your—fuck—in—boy—friend!"

"No. I mean who the fuck are you? *Why am I here with you?*"

"Bad—idea—I—guess"

She stands, pulls up her pants. "No, Jamie. How did we meet? How did tonight come to be?"

He's crouched, red-faced. Won't look her way. "I met you at a sandwich shop in Astoria. You needed a ride. You didn't know where. I didn't know your story but I gave you a ride."

"Where? To your bed?"

"Yah, Maya. You didn't seem to have many options." He looks at her finally. "Don't you remember?"

"Did you fuck me the first night or were you a gentleman?"

"Maya, you crawled into my bed nude. Fuck! Are you a retard? You did what you wanted. We're here because you said you were bored."

Maya looks at him so fiercely he crawls near whimpering for his clothes.

"You're leaving for good this time?" said softly. Sad. What the world offers, what it takes away. How sometimes it soon matters so little.

Explains nothing, mostly. The world explains nothing & yet one must decide, must move, keep moving, think, feel, ask, give, & nothing explained.

Maya leaves, motel room door still open, finds herself in a parking lot on a cold day. She's in jeans & tie-dye. Shivering. Not knowing. Stands a minute. Resists looking back at that door. Stands another minute. Resists. Another.

Returns. "I need a ride." "Are you kidding?" "And your jacket." "Maya?"

"No. I need a ride to the bus station. And your jacket. This is how you're going to show me I meant something to you. OK?"

"Why don't we just go home & sleep on it? It's not late. We could get some food on the way back."

"Jamie, look at my *fucking face*! See it? Is there anything in it for you anymore?"



"You're beautiful, Maya. Is that what you want me to say?"

Samantha, why doesn't he listen?

He doesn't want to, Maya.

Is he stupid?

No. But you're not telling him what's going on.

I want Dylan. I want something good back.

What do you want?

I want this to stop happening.

Nobody knows where the scorch mark in the movie screen comes from. None of the theater staff were there. No fire alarms went off. Nobody at the midnight showing of *Remoteland* reported it or complained. But there it was when the ushers came around to clean up. Now what to do about it? No other signs of vandalism.

Then someone noticed, the mark had a shape to it. "Spooky shit. Those cracked out little fucks put it there on purpose."

"We're leaving. Tonight."

"Why, sir?"

"I'm Bowie. Say it!"

"Bowie. But we don't use personal names here in vocal exchange."

"Say it."

"Bowie."

"Say it."

"Bowie."

"Now tell me your name."

"I can't. I don't know it."

"Tell me."

"I'm . . . not sure. I'm sorry."

"I'll name you. You're Christa."

"We can't leave."

"Are we prisoners?"

"No. There's nowhere to go."

"You have a choice. I'll take you."

"Who's Gretta?"

He stares at her. "You said that name once in your sleep."

"She's gone."

"Did you love her?"

"Yes."

"More than me?"

"I don't know yet."

She looks at him. "I'll go."

'Stina brings her friend around. Penelope. Penny. Penny is young, pretty, but unsure. I decide. No, that's wrong. Something so primitive in me it's pre-lingual, deep mucked in ancestral

genes,

I'm going to fuck her one way or another—

She brings boyfriends & I let her know I don't like it. I let her know I like her in braids & low-cut blouses. I let her know I am going to take her at my chosen time. Most of this happens plainly. Most lies, most crime, most hate, most brutality happens plainly—

'Stina is happy & sees nothing. She's in love with me & sees our work as simple & true.

The first time it happens is at a party, in the bathroom, she bites my hand as I push her jeans & thong down far enough to get my aching cock into her wet round ass, each time harder, I know it hurts her, & I do it again, she is territory to mark this time, no more, I say one thing, "don't cum" & neither do I, though closer than I'd reveal—

Now marked, she waits. The party hasn't slowed. Hunted people rouse up the shit best. The music sucks. Remember that shitty SF movie with the rave scene the night before the big battle? Yah, bad like that.

Penny & I don't talk the rest of the night. She doesn't try. She wouldn't mess this up for anything. We're getting people out, people who'd otherwise be freighted up for the War.

She isn't terribly imaginative, I think, & I learn I'm wrong but later. When I return to the Bridge of Glass finally, it's for her.

He talks to me about the White Woods, only me, it's the missing piece nobody else knows. I'm not sure how much of it is true. I'm not even sure why it haunts him so much. I just listen. Usually several of us sleep in his bed & he caps tightly all but how we're to please him & he's to please . . . his ideas—we do what he wants. Nothing really sates him. His ideas won't let him have easy hours.

"We were close. That's why we stayed. That's what those years were sacrificed for."

"Yes."

"We wanted to make a breach, we were building it, making it. It was close. She was the key. That's what he believed."

"Who?"

"Maya! She was the key! It was stupid, what happened."

"Is it over?"

He pauses. Looks at her like she's border patrol instead of his oft-fucked high-end piece of ass. Says nothing.

Remembering a strong hour, too fucking much, the air buckling with cold, a city, a street, traffic, always traffic, why traffic? Tell me! Slow. Breathe. The air, & that woman, huddled in rags under that umbrella, still, perfectly still

do I believe in God?

does God believe in all

this? Are you here? Reading this? There was that women, huddled in her rags, on the street, sidewalk I mean, against the post office wall, plain faces looking out its window for a bus, huddled, the umbrella was bright red & huge, she tented beneath it, huddled into herself, a lost sleeping cub with nothing but her own warmth to grub, that's shit sentiment but next, see I was walking with my books & I looked at her with, what, fright? dismay, wish for a camera? It was near Christmas, I thought here's a Season's Greetings for the King or the President or the Pope or whoever should see a photo of such a thing & crack—

& crack—crack loudly—crack like it was going to echo—yes—a photo would do it—sent in a greeting card envelope but no greeting card & yes it would arrive at his house & somehow he would be the one to check the mail that day, I don't know, but he would smile & think oh a Christmas card from a fan or a follower or whatever he calls his people—& there would be the photo in his hands—

*God? You said God to
me? Just now?*

I heard you, you see her umbrella was bright red but there were stickers on it & I think graffiti too—I think she had been there awhile like that crazy guy on that other street who shakes his voodoo rattle stick & yells at buses & traffic about the cops are communists & they say he lost a son to the cops or maybe his son killed a cop I don't know the weed was so good but I don't do that shit no more—

his heart would crack, that King or Pope, & he'd sit on the floor smack between his fancy armchairs & he would groan & say no & try to recover his senses, his pre-smile-how-nice-an-Xmas-card-from-a-slave-of-mine but no sorry Charlie you don't get to go back—so solly—you sit there & look at that photo of that woman in rags underneath her red shit fucking red umbrella & read the stickers one says

SAVE THE WORLD KILL THE HUMANS

but maybe it was the other way around I don't know but the graffiti was really intricate

& the woman I ran into next her crazy face SHE'S THERE 24/7 on that SIDEWALK she yelled at me as we crossed in the the street it was a warning a curse an explanation had the ragged woman killed her pup reached out a long purple tentacled claw one morning when this lady was hurrying her pooch named Gold Star Heavens? to the vet that tentacle arced out & snap! went Goldstar's neck & snap! went Goldstar's spine & snap snap snap snap!!!! when his furry little legs in their furry little booties & before the woman could scream or vomit the tentacle pulled the pup slooop sloosh into the woman's slurpy maw & it was like Goldstar Heavens? had never existed & the woman under the umbrella crunched twice & it was over had anyone seen

*THAT LUNATIC EAT MY
DOG DID YOU SEE THAT*

*but you see the closer you
pack humans & more you
make them hunger for what
cannot be had with a dollar the
more you point them around for
their happiness the more you
attire them for brute denial, give
them a deep within sense of perpetual
punishment for their flesh for
their wishes, the more they will
back away from each other as each
sees his affliction in every other &
somehow blames all—*

ah fuck I had my books there were a thick armload of them I was running out of time I was nearly lost & these books had to help I needed a formula I needed to know less & more simultaneously had to know I'd buy it or steal it or build it but I was nearly out of time—

I had been standing that dawn in a wet field, I was naked, I was not alone, & there nearby was the White Woods & she had run from them to me, into me, fallen down, barely dressed looking up at me & I looked down at her in her crouch she had long blonde hair her body was curvy but not so much I would cry out her breasts were round & her nipples were hard from cold or maybe seeing I was nude too & her ass was perfectly round I told her rollover & she whimpered & I looked & I touched then I said roll over again & her pussy was gleaming bare & I looked at her & I smiled for this is what I had come for this is what I wanted & she would give it to me but I think she had already so I stopped just shy just shy just shy I was close she was whimpering some more & some words I did not listen to she explained something to me that seemed important as I did what I wanted tooooooooooo I was so close when I stopped stopped I stopped I could not go on because I had tied her hands together & gagged her mouth so she would shut the fuck up & I told her I would bring her back to the White Woods did she want that? And her eyes were wet & she nodded her head & did what I said & I said I won't bring you back but I have to know did this happen before & she shook her head but I yelled & I was rough & I took off the gag tell me now & she stuttered that's what she had run from tell me you love me tell me you love me her thighs soft & wet as I made them & I was tender now & she calmed down & I promised no gag OK she nodded & let me & that was good & I told her to breathe slowly in my ear as I did & she did & she promised she would please me but no White Woods please no White Woods I was close her stomach was wet from me sliding & her breasts were round & aroused

*you ask me about
God you ask me
about God you ask
me about God*

but I topped slowly & as I stopped I told her to breathe harder as she felt me stop more & more

I carried her asleep in my arms to where I had left my stuff & gone to pray in the wet dawn fields I had a towel & told her to stand still while I dried her & she kept watching me as I dried her & asked her if I was too rough she shook her head & I dressed her in my clothes I told her to hold still & I took out my pillow & blanket that I share with nobody ever since they were given to me & I made her a bed under some willow branches & she fell asleep & I followed a little way into her dreams they were metallic & glaring & I saw why she was whimpering all the time & I made a few adjustments & her dream tumbled gone into itself ate itself like that snake & it became cool & sweet & faceless & her hands floated up near me so I sat near & made

sure the pillow stayed in place & the blanket didn't fall off it was how I met her & I let her sleep later I taught her some things the day was many hours from then to now still—

Maya wakes, cries out. Looks around. A bed. Walls white, bare. Closet door open, her clothes hung from hangers. The black bureau with its drawers full of plain underwear & socks. Nothing pretty. She is told humans must learn to endure better, must take nature's austere lessons.

Trees' leaves turn colors in the fall, don't they? Sunsets? Peacocks? Robins' eggs. Jaguars. The ocean? She says nothing.

She has a radio, it's her prize, it's pink, cat-shaped. Not hidden, not contraband, what's left from her last foster home. They think at this place she was abused but she wasn't. She was kept separately from all that, in fact, but they don't take her radio because of what they think.

That & her hair's stripe of pink. That's all. None of her clothes. None of her books. No photographs.

"You will not suffer here, but you will learn to contain your ego, your youth's natural arrogance toward thoughts of immortality. No other creature fancies such things. None."

Maya learns to say little. The meals are plain but she likes them. The books tease her with deeper meanings while, in truth, eluding her want for a few ideas to hold clearly in her mind.

Nothing sticks. The lessons are long but they do not stick. What she learned is from the radio, & from the daily visits to the nearby park.

She listens to her radio at night, careful to keep it on a news station when footsteps approach her room. They approve of news. "Behold men by the values they mass espouse through media & media's dogs, the bureaucrats who fancy themselves leaders. Sum for yourself what the presumptions, & what arguments unhad, what ideas little entertained. Listen closely. What don't they consider?"

When the steps fall away, she listens to music. Her cat-radio's eyes glow a yellow-green in the dark. Maya imagines he is singing to her, dreams he is singing to her, sometimes wishes she was the radio singing to him, listening, purring maybe.

Music enveloped her, there in her bedroom, the window without shade or curtain, her single pillow & white blanket, her pajamas a long sleeved shirt & pants set, no decorations, she listens, then listens deeper, thinks I want my dreams full of this music & it begins to happen, music runs through her dreams, visible like hills, like morning light, sweet like fruit, near, soft, ideas she can hold fluttering—

it cannot last—she knows it can't & waits what will happen next—

which surprises her—since it's a trip to the ocean, she doesn't know why save that a lesson is involved again, & nobody says much to her the whole day & she meets Samantha that day, only confirming it cannot last & it is Samantha who tells her to run, to put on three layers of her plain clothes, & sneak a paper bag for her radio & second pair of shoes & go, go!

What would have happened? She doesn't know. She believes Samantha saved her even as she doesn't know from what—

Later I watch you wake & I move under the blanket with you & I touch you watch my eyes as I do & I touch some more I think how you're like a beautiful statue in a museum & I tell you to hold still & you do for me you are learning what to do for me & I am glad for I prayed for you many nights in that field & now you are here I slow myself to see you as my feast & though you remain I must consume you each time very slowly the hours I don't know there is quiet there this is my place our place now but still mine I share it with you but you are mine here in my place I move softly over you as you hold still my eyes follow my fingers & sometimes my mouth tastes it is all music that's what I did to your dreams you had forgot something & I could not know but I did know that it was something like music & I followed along your back how it curved, how heated, how fused with pulsing light & I followed you even closer & you shook a bit when I moved between your thighs close, closer, the barely seen blonde hair on your inner thighs, closer, you began talking but I didn't know I touched I licked lightly my fingers stroked til its rousal sweated and I pushed a little in & she kept talking & I was going to do something when I heard the word God—& stopped—& listened—

"I was God—I was something—I was the key—his plan—I didn't know why—"

I lean in ignore the word best I can, lean all the way in, sniff, gently, sniff close, a breath, a shiver, close my eyes more, forbid vision, follow the scent, let no words describe it, follow its fenceless path, not down, not deep but up, toward skies with the emperor Moon, the one who used to rule, used to be great, to the emperor Moon, it's like a great eye, a kind, knowing eye, in love, wide open eye in love, the scent takes me I am nothing else but up toward the great emperor Moon, great rule, not like what there is now, small men surrounded by guns & commandments, up, up, strange shores, did you know the great Moon of old had shores & all men were brought there to dance? On those strange shores our race danced, does anyone know how we did?

Something startles me & I am back with her. She is talking again, very softly, but I hear, she is afraid, I hear it, & she'd said about God before, & I stand her up, my statue, stand her & dress her in my clothes again, she is soft, you are warm, I am excited & I am scared, we are near the White Woods, I'll never let you back there, ever, I will kill the world before I'll let you back there.

lvi. / xix.

"Shit."

"What was *that*?"

"It was new."

"Did you get a clear shot of it?"

"Yah, we can check the vid later. But I'm sure it was clean & steady."

"But where did it come from?"

"I don't know, man."

"She was in *Trip Town*, man!"

"I know! Calm down."

"Look, it's a giant ass clue. We've been dickin' around for months. I should say, *they've* been dickin' *us* around."

"Yah. But no. It's all relevant, you *know* that."

"This is what we need. Nobody will say shit. Time to join the tribes. *Now*."

"Some won't. They don't believe it & never will."

"Not when we upload this vid! This is the proof!"

“Like every UFO movie ever taken? Like the 9/11 missile that hit the Pentagon? Like the Grassy Knoll triangulation? C’mon, don’t be a naïf.”

“God, she’s hot. Cream-i-licious.”

“Yah.”

“So what do we say with the vid when we put it up? Do we anonymize our upload? Do we pop a link on their site & see what happens?”

“I dunno, man, let’s hit it now & watch it. I need some jah.”

His hookah pipe is an elaborate orgy in purples & pinks, they’ve tried to untangle the limbs & faces & cocks & breasts but there’s always extra, or not enough. His hashish is black, he calls it Mohammed Virgins PubeHash, or something else another night.

Hook up cam to Mac & watch, closely, the music is from ’73, ELP’s *Brain Salad Surgery*, the show that never ends—

Three trees tipped in the wet wind, a shaking, howling dance, from them suddenly blow two great crows, their shadows stretching far behind them, now pulling the trees, shaking & stretching longer & longer, a doubling, a tripling, the sky fragments & the crows fly through wedging the three trees, shadows whipping at the chasm—

“Fuck!”

The computer screen gels, melts, falls back, pulls pulls, their room tips toward it—

“Shit, man!”

Tip, tip, tip more, OK, time to decide, what will happen next?

Bowie snaps awake. Darkness. He’d done that, an old trick, it wasn’t really that dark in this cabin but he knew they were being chased, & they’d find nothing in here, no lights would work, no sounds, nothing, a grubbing hand would find nothing, a nose nothing, he couldn’t say for sure Christa was still with him but he knew she was—

He keeps them cloaked for as long as his energy lasts, he can’t sleep & maintain it fully, it’s a chance when he lets it dissipate, but finally he does, tries to loose it in steps but he’s rusty, shit, back when he could have had it on & off & on again like a good old sock—now he’s jerky—

Anyway, nothing. He sniffs, they’ve passed.

Christa sleeps. She’s been trying to be brave but she doesn’t know the world. Her pajamas are plain but still he knows what tight moaning curves they blandly conceal. She prayed the night before. A mumble, seemed like foreign words. Smiled at him vaguely afterword, didn’t explain.

He’d be easier to his escape if he was alone. Taking her was a risk.

Face it, she’s sweet pussy & a nice bit of company. You’ll make sure she gets back safely. By now they’ve figured you’re too much trouble but she belongs to them. This is theft.

He starts. A person? Theft? Was she a slave? Is she one now?

No. But they were a tribe, obviously, some kind of tribe, whether they used that word, & she belonged to them. A tribe isn’t careless with its fecund pretty ones. Travel somewhere that isn’t true. *Try*.

He’d reached crossroads like this before, & waited, & breathed, & sooner or later something would happen, & he’d *go*. Happened at Luna T’s, happened many times before.

Wait, breathe, *go*.

So, no plan. Other than escape, if indeed he'd been a prisoner. Still wasn't clear. Nothing was. Even ditching Christa back to her tribe made sense with little *rightness*.

Wait, breathe. *Go*.

The crows startled him. At the window, too big, ridiculous big.

Will my brother see me? I haven't seen Shawn in years, more than years if I knew another way to put it.

Yet he was my baby brother, I loved him a long time ago.

"I loved him the way I love you," I nearly said that night, the night I cried. I didn't. I wanted other words.

What do I ask? Do you remember Penelope? Sure, Gen. Was she real? Was she our sister? Did she die? Did she move away? Uh, Gen . . .

Yah, I know, Shawn. Back to St. Cuckoo's Hospital. More pills to tongue. More therapy sessions. More night interns to get felt up by in the dark til I learn what a few sucks on a half-limp number can get me.

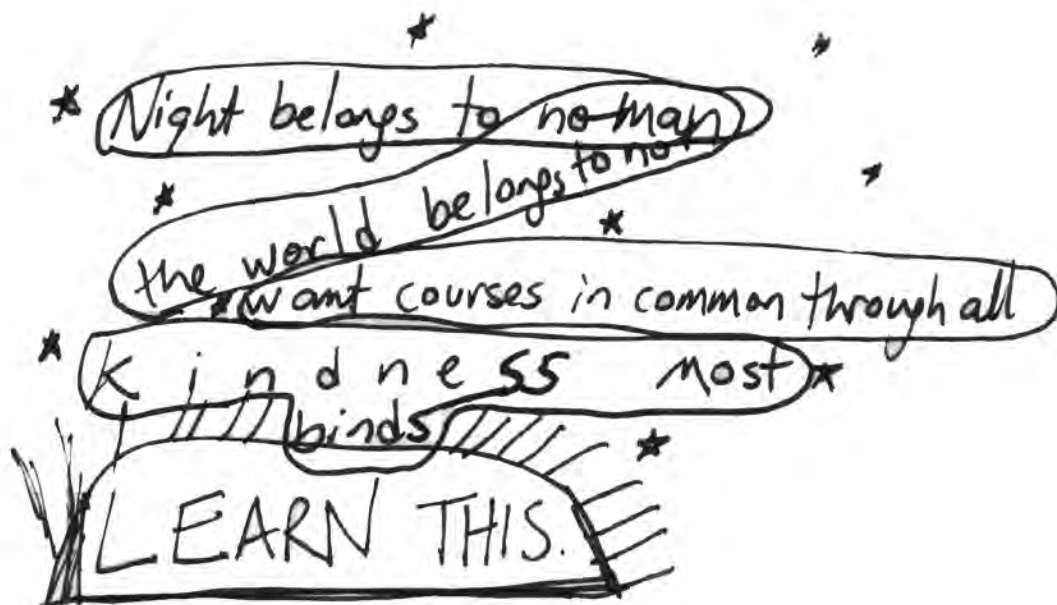
I know, Shawn. You couldn't forgive me. You didn't understand & you didn't *want* to. Was Penny real, Shawn? *Was she fucking real?*

Preacher once took us to this lake, it was a killer hike, miles through woods, I don't know if there was a path, not much if any. We didn't walk so fast but we didn't stop either.

I fell into a rhythm, past tired & restless like usual. I felt *completely present*—after awhile I understood that a path wasn't needed, that I simply had to follow the woods' own flow & I would pass through fine. The sunshine hit in shattered moments, lighting up a web here, a patch of tree moss there—and I was in such a groove the dusk came naturally & I was alone—I'd lost any attention I'd had to the others hours ago—

I wasn't afraid—I trusted Preacher—he hadn't led me here to lose me—

The voices began as noisy wind, as less maybe, but then they were all around me, it was like a chorus with several lead voices, each his own lyric:



Words & voices & wind. I don't know what happened but the woods turned white & I was afraid now so I said all of those words, sometimes straight through sometimes I skipped some or mixed them up. Even now there is a gap. Fuck, is Penny there? Why do I wonder this?

Before it all goes bad there is a day with Penelope, I'm not sure how it happened, & a temptation, a blunt one, to go

Thing is, I could have, I had mad bank to spare, & several accounts nobody knew about, I could have lifted Penelope into my arms & seated her in a rented car, a new one if I felt like it, & driven off—could have—& I was close—What did she have? Until that day I didn't know—she was a fine piece—she was a head game to keep life slightly skewed, a bit dangerous—

She kept close-lipped, knew I was having people over to discuss more elaborate ideas for a simple reason: parties broke out. Our safe-house was beloved, I was beloved, me & 'Stina as a couple were beloved, secret legends—a model of modesty & innovation, a service to the Revolution, blah blah fucking blah—

Parties broke out. Exotic drugs broke out. 'Stina partook & thought I did.

I did often enough to cover my simple reason: to fuck Penelope, fuck her hard, fuck her often, fuck her with a hundred people under my virtue-built roof. So I tongued my pill, & later tongued her clit. Tongued it with the stud I'd gotten just to tongue her—

I don't know what it was in truth—I didn't love her. I didn't love anything anymore.

What I really wanted were those first moments, that thrill, Penelope knew what I wanted & I paid for it. She dressed like a modest modern girl on the outside & like a strange somehow expensive whore underneath. I had a set of books just for her lingerie, to go with the secret bank accounts, & the drugs that paid for the whole operation—

That day I keep thinking about was when I saw Penelope true for the first time—& everything ended pretty quickly afterward

The night before, a massive party, she'd talked me into shopping with her for her lingerie, the next afternoon, we'd never really gone out alone, I wasn't eager but she worked magic on me that night—

Blonde, green eyes, 5 foot 4, nice tits, sweetest little ass you could imagine—& that was all I pretty much cared about—a pretty young fuck doll I dressed up & stripped down—

There was more & I see that now. What I saw before that day was nothing.

Seeing nothing, so fucking crazy focused on nothing, all that was going on around me wasn't there for me either—

It was gone so quickly, all of it, the safe-house, Penelope, all of the rest—someone once told me at a party early on, smiled & said, "Enjoy it. It doesn't last." I nodded. Knew nothing.

She told me about Maya, she told me more & more, I listened long by when I didn't want to, too much, & everything ended because nothing had been what it was anyway; suddenly, in a few hours, I knew what I hadn't before & it was over—

The pink stripe in Maya's blonde hair the same shade as a garter belt set I pointed out to her—

The night belongs to no man. Want courses in common through all. Kindness most binds. Learn—

what? That was what is really hard, what to learn but words, their near futility, & a last breath, one way or another. And yet, and yet . . .

Slower. One at a time. The night belongs to no man. I believe that, I always have. The night is powerful, I don't know why. Do you feel it? And you? Come back to it.

Want courses in common through all. I believe this too. Is it simply sex or sup? No. Want is the devil's truth in saying we are one, I am one, both. Neither kings the other, each seems to explain the world mutually exclusive. Come back to it.

Kindness most binds. Indifference sunders. Faces on a train, each a worrying world alone in silence, they all sway as the train sways, & yet, & yet?

Night. Want. Kindness. Nearly a formula, an elixir. Yet none complete the world, the world completes itself.

Night. Want. Kindness. Sentiments, & dissatisfying.

I look around the bar at Luna T's Cafe, there are lights strung everywhere, some blinking, pictures of snowmen jamming lead guitars on the wall, there's a crowd tonight, it's loud, I'm not even at the bar but a table nearby. There's a football game on TV & the drinkers roar & wail, I suppose the annual football betting pool is well underway. I watch & feel sad, why haven't I been here in so long?

Mr. Bob the barman spies me & raises a hand high, a smile to uncake any frosted heart. I wave back. I feel better now.

Night. Want. Kindness. Alright then. Not ideas best worked with from the ether. Nights are full beasts, whether trees or city lights. Want is a pink curve in part shadows, or a soul watching through bars, or a world ending in countless hard ways. Kindness is water fetched, is the luck of a rightly spoken word, is empathy one stranger to another's struggle.

And still not close enough, not nearly.

lvii. / xx.

I save you from the White Woods but I cannot keep, I can't even touch you as I dream, so near & you smile at me, you would, you know, it's OK, good, skin nears skin, & yet, & yet—

I have to bring you & I have to fade after, that's how, bring & fade, that's how,

I'm angry as I carry you, nothing OK, nothing fine, no why in this, bring & fade, I stop after hours & lay you down like old & you smile, you are returning, I say nothing & you don't reply but water, there, good, water, & soup with bread, it's nothing to how I love you, I rest near you, hear beat, hear breath, try to forget bring & fade but nothing to it, even if I reveal your light a little to the moon & a little more, you don't mind, you smile, you doze, what is it? A divide in my mind, my blood barks for your touch, but music, music is free, music comes & goes, you are music, you've eaten the old sadness, whatever it was, whatever I was, what mirrors won't show.

Shh. I have to go. It's OK, it's OK. The morning will be beautiful, will be velvet. You've worlds to go, I was given to bring you like this & then fade off.

Mine is not to have music but to pass it through. You are so beautiful.

I am changed.

We begin, we continue, something ends, everything, little sense, but the sentiments mount, time stretches out weirdly & farther from its concise moment of screaming hunger, from the

questions about the world each answers by quote another, or at best saying I don't know, what's the answer? I don't know, sleep now, time stretches weirdly & stories fill in where truth demurs, stories hurry up to obscure every open moony sky, stories link & form myths, myths smile gleamly power & flirty full call it truth really, truth? No, really, truth? That fist points skyward, claiming simple mouthpiece to unseen omnipotence & speaking mercy on on & damnation on another, simple mouthpiece, in something we trust trust trust move your hips a little more baby let the power touch you deeper truth is nothing like faith or belief truth is unsentimental truth does not shrug or shy or remember kindly slantly, truth sings & what listens is not deceived nor comforted, ah truth, fuck truth, what truth, untellable truth, unprovable truth, ah, move them a little more, go on, now, let the truth in a little deeper, very nice

Truth, gimme some truth, go on, tell me a truth untaught, tell me, one unread, unheard, what is truth before gauzed in words, go on, gimme some truth, fuck, come on! Gimme some truth! Gimme some goddamned truth

Move your fucking hips, bitch! Fuck like a dog or let the next one in—

Truth, see it every day, shy far by it, OK, I do too, every one in this punk cafeteria, put truth in a song, leave a little out, soften it a bit OK, sell it with a skinny skirt neath a barely sheathed set of fine tits, truth, melody it up in ambiguities, call it an argument to be had, bring the eggheads in from all three dozen coasts, go on, & a few wise men with thick wallets &

"Damn it!"

"What happened?"

"Your camera is trash, man."

"Were we there? Were we close?"

"No. Nothing."

"What do we do? Go back to the theatre?"

"Look around. We're here. We never left."

"HOW MUCH FUCKING ACID HAVE WE EATEN?"

"All of it. Now it never ends. We are here now."

"Aww, man."

"Aww gone!"

Maya looks up. OK. Nobody's with her. Nobody's watching. Where? A diner. Where? She's dressed in clothes they'd taken from her, in her pink Jimi Hendrix t-shirt, her beat blue jeans, her worn tan slippers, oh! her hat! Floppy shapeless hat they took from her instead of her radio. OK. A diner. Where?

They waitress eyes her, Maya secretly finds & fingers the money in her pocket, asks for a soda.

Her book. It was Samantha, sort of.

She tries to think. It wasn't like this. One hour, the next, but now, no. One hour, some other hour.

He starts talking to her. Eyes her t-shirt, talking to her. Smiles like a book, talks to her. He has a car, he's the first one of several who probably won't hurt her for a kick just off the highway. She can't stay her. The waitress doesn't like the men who eye her for a stretch then say



hello like a pressing hand. Sympathy, jealousy? His name is Jamie. She goes with him.

He's not shy just wants her age & legal status. She offers neither. What he wants he'll not get, it's not there for him, it's not hers right now, she gets him going because it will just complicate things til it happens, he's a rough rider at first, tries for it without a condom, she hits him with a thick fucking book & points to every sloppy nosy neighbor within scream's distance—puts on rubbers, gets her pills, she takes it awhile then adjusts—how the fuck did she end up in that diner again? What is she doing with Jamie again, Maya, this is Samantha, Where are you? He's in the shower, it's your first night here, am I going forward or backward, Samantha? He comes out nude & showered, his towel riding low, answer me, Samantha! Moves between her hips, he's not that big, how does she know that, & his hand at pushing down her panties in clumsy, do you want me to stop, pretty girl? Aren't you a bad girl? Need a spanking? Her knee to his groin is so hard he falls off the bed in a breathless howl, on the floor, let me hurt him, Maya, let me hurt him some more

When they catch up with Bowie it is a bad hour, he orders Christa into a closet, pushes her screaming into it, thinking they will kill him & take her back there, it is a bad hour because Bowie crosses a moment with love, that instinct, that belly-secret sweetness, that breath between every other breath, he says nothing, not a thing but is a bad hour when they find him—

MK-ULTRA was the play for the numbers. It's what we called everyone else. Not population or citizens, just the numbers. MK-ULTRA was the simple feed. Dose businessmen visiting hookers & see what they do. Dose this one, dose another, build the perfect killing machine, set him to the killing. Another. Another.

I'd say what really happened but nothing did. Many things did. People disappear every day. Some we use for awhile. Some we use up & burn quickly. We did what we do but nothing closed the doors. That's what nobody sees now. The doors open & *do not close*. Ever. There can be a distracting shift away from the door, there can be a veil or two prettying some other view—

I left as I was able. But, Christa, I was what I was. As I killed your kinsmen, one by one, I talked to Gretta about you.

“Bowie, are you sure?”

“It's her, Gretta. We talked about her. You remember.”

“You're not mine to let go, Bowie”

“It's more than that. It's not that at all”

“What?”

“She needs protection. She needs sanctuary.”

“Where?”

“There. You know.”

“Luna T's? Are you coming back?”

“No. Not inside. Just to the door. You'll take her”

“She's what you saw? Are you sure?”

He lets the last two shoot each other in a terror of will & truth, & they fall. A pile of corpses. Bleeding, fresh, just alive, just now. Bowie undoes a pouch around his neck. A tap of

powder, a small fingernail's amount, a cry, a smoke, something, there is that freedom he sees when the numbers go, that release like all this was cage not reward, he always follows a little but then stops, lets it happen

Opens the door & leads Christa out, leads her to the place where they fell, where their terrors coalesced for a last time, spreads her & blankets & pillows, undoes her hair, licks her body without once looking in her eyes, licks her nearer & nearer, she moans & cries, she wants & fears, she growls now, her voice gets rougher, demands, harder, dream into her, dream closer, her want stretches round & round, she arches, she squeezes, dream a little nearer, velvet hours, nearer, how does he love me? What am I remembering? I was someone, I was someone else, I was something else, the light was kind, was drink, I was not one but many, I was someone else, I was something else, velvet hours, tell me, Bowie, were you there with me? What was I? What am I now? What is this? How do you show me this? How do you show me it again? Where are you? Where are you, Bowie? Where are you?

"He'll be back in awhile. You're safe here with us."

Is this the Bridge of Glass or am I dreaming it? Or is it dreaming me? What happened back there? Tell me something, I was so close, tell me something now! Who is Maya? How am I supposed to? Everything back there is changed, & now it's fucking gone!

She told me about Maya. She said we'd be sitting in a room with some others, it would be a room between worlds, of many worlds, countless worlds, no worlds, & I had to know which one was Maya, I had to be sure which one was Maya & I had to take both her hands & say when you make that choice it will be right but what is any of this Penny belonged to me without thought I created a world of my own, a world within world of my own for her, she was the inmost crevice, I came to her through curtains & walls within walls, she waited, she posed, fucking posed!

That last day, until that last hour, she posed for me, was it more than an hour, was it anything at all? Just fucking pose, it's all I want, the skirts shorter, the blouses tighter, pose fucking pose, I wanted only the least unrevealed, how was this possible? What was I doing? She said nothing when I wanted others watching when I wanted her ringed round, I pressed it, where were we? What was I? Was it a girl? A new break in the plane? Who is Maya? Why are you gone, Penelope?

Shawn is not home. I can't even tell if he lives here or ever did, I sit on this porch & he is not home. The door is locked. Windows dark. No answer to knock or bell. Why am I afraid to kick the fucking thing over?

I sit on the porch longer. I want Preacher back. I want to fuck Preacher. I always did. So did every other girl. He led us away from ourselves, gestured on, smiled, always on, the promise was never spoken, never made finally so neither kept nor broken, but always there, sometimes I felt it in my belly, sometimes my thighs. Always in my breathing, I breathe better now, fuller, & I despise it. Fullness & emptiness. No Preacher. No Penelope. No Shawn. Where now? I keep sitting on this porch. The night comes. I look around, really look around, snap from my fever & take a look.

It's winter. Snowy fields. Lots of them. This house is one of several. A full moon rises & eventually I see more. I don't remember how I got out here. The barn. A well over there. Something in all this.

The barn is open, I push in & look for a corner, a mongrel black & white collie walks up to me, a crazy look, a kind one, we share up some space, close like that I fall into his beautiful coat, his breathing, his want for love in a touch, I croon to him, very softly, eventually dream of the glare, the arcing glare Preacher once talked about, he said it comes like desire, consumes the eye until only music or despair remain, I croon into our dreams, through them—

lviii. / xxi.

Where the rest? I wonder who knows. How want's deep ulcer, music's hard salve.

Where the rest? Through cities snarls a remain, a flame in skirts, a press using cock's trigger, for more than spasm, more than a softness made to mewl with hunger, more, inner powers dreaming lusts where no flesh remains

Where the rest? Do you know? Shadows rush your floor, cross with a live edge. Where the rest? Breathe. Where the rest? Breathe.

What raises, & again, I ask this countless in pretty hours & others. World among worlds, there is no less or more. Creature among creatures, few the differences, any?

I ask the same questions, the old ones about want, about beauty, whatever answer limits, answers break to function—world divides, & again, toward its obsessing, lesser work.

Where the rest? Is there a rest? Maybe not.

lvix. / xxii.

Reck flesh's blunt vow to breach space, arc will, bite for touch, know oneness by hunger's plain truth, what courses common in all, come's flame to soil's consume. Oneness, suffering in knowing, brilliant breaths of aching music—

The body wants, the mind yearns, Maya learned the difference, where she opened up, where she didn't, the depths she let Jamie to, the ones she let him aware of, & how much did it matter, that was the worst of it, she wouldn't let him but so far in, & he didn't press, didn't know. He went to the art films, read their books, his CDs added steadily, what the fuck? He liked stability but more, he was a *lunatic* for it. Had she stayed, he would have lived in her familiar ground perpetually. He didn't ask. Didn't want her to tell.

When she left it was simply the rest.

how flesh yearns flesh, dark pearl in every running blood, ferment & strew, how the world punishes, croons wait, croons deny, sings it foul then praises dirt for its truth. Else, breathe, crazy one, wake, blink, call this your world—

Christa sits, alone, at Luna T's Cafe's bar. Says little. Waits. Tries not to wait.

He left me here. He killed the people trying to bring me back, *killed them all*, & then left me here.

Are all women so claimed? Is this what they tried to protect me from, if any of it was protection?

I don't know where I am but he put me here. Alone, but not really. Something always connects, pushes, talks at me. My life is movement & noise.

I'm safe here. I don't know whether to stay. I've never had an unscripted hour.

"Safe from who?" I say out loud.

“Miss?” the barman looks blithely at me but I’m not fooled.
I *really* don’t know whether to stay.

prison bars branching beautifully to the sky, electric lights guarding against too much blind thought. Wake, blink, breathe, crazy one. Ferment, strew, in that disappearing glare wails some other universe. Here flesh watches, closer, feels you—

it’s always been a fucking bridge of fucking glass, since those days with my granpa, how can I still think with amazement on him? What was it? He worked easily with animals & engines. No. What else. His drink was Scotch, I think he even chewed tobacco some afternoons. No. He viewed women & children as equal nuisances. Am I remembering him correctly? I don’t know. It seems awfully important I remember him right.

He once said, “Nothing is settled finally in this life. Do your best. Pay up. Zip up. Life always leaves something open. That extra.”

nobody sure utters why yet instructions for every fenceless path, each new molten press. No way on but dis-illusion, escape from pockets, through walls to other walls, cross a bridge of glass &—

I want to find him, find Preacher, ask him things. Ask with my words & ask with my loins. The black & white collie wags tail at me. I nod. I’ve been wagging tail most of my life too. Tail is friendly, & distracting.

“Wanna come? Huh? Wanna come & help me find Preacher? Wanna watch while I fuck him happy & humble? Huh?”

The collie won’t follow, wags, tail, loves me endless, won’t follow. Why I thought, I don’t know. How have I been living these past few years?

I give him a long hug, say goodbye & I love you & thank you & can you feel this from me? Something new began for me out here. I’m going to follow it on.

ask: new sweet juice in hand leap out or in another thousand, ignorant, pounding, hopeful steps? Learn it: nothing salves the closest wounds. Have I learned this? Do I want to teach it? What comfort, what light in it. Flesh becks pretty & hearts heat fine, this already known, limbs chase their new tangles, hearts look for soil to share & stake. But then, always, nearly, ferment & strew. Remember, oneness rises in both I & we. Yearn a print in deepest soil.

“What’s real, man?”

“I don’t know. That shit’s tough.”

“When did it get like this?”

“Like what?”

“Like *this*”

“Say it!”

“We don’t ever leave. Don’t you see that? We live inside this story. Out *there*, it’s called *Remoteland*. But it’s our lives. What’s left?”

We look at each other. Where’s Charlie?

Dust stirs up a new one even as another, unspent, passes through. Never knowing all, lights

long stretch the highway, never knowing. Not enough told, not enough can be, what does any of it mean? Breath, move, feed, mate, spend, expend. A gift. The glare, the sugar, every fermenting hour with no final arrival. A secret. A joke. Matter of view.

lx. / xxiii.

Creatures dreaming, between the drifts, what was, what could be, take it slow here, strike a long arcing note, dreaming, in alleys & barns, creatures dreaming, a tuck closer in to warm blood, a scratch, settle, twist & fall deeper, pry at the day's damage, the life's sum, what is nearing, what gone, dreaming tonight, between the drifts, what of? what for? Long arcing note, caterwaul brighter, from high waves of pink & green toward wheezing & dust? Say? Say! Drop the walls & say!

Dreams of grain, of warmth, of union, what of? what for? Say! The tribe or herd feeds together & most reckon this a life, what of that one with her pink-striped blonde hair, what of those screaming in the hailing fields, there are ideas that do not preach bind nor clump, that lure toward parting, toward empty roads, toward reverence for an intelligent glare past that hill, & that one, & one more—

Winter's cold, & colder still in a few hours, winter presses what's close closer, burns its silent power deep, creatures dreaming, drifts cross the road, jeeps & trailers overturned & empty, a man stands lone & will not ask of the passing traffic—how few new answers collect & stay—

a black & white collie asleep in a winter's back, tail twitching at a dream's kind hand, there is kindness in the nameless depths, now over there, despair a thousand teeth ravenous—we know so little—

Little salves the closest wounds, moonlight capsules a still body, words of rock anchoring a heart decades later, joy's tetherless hours, what was it then, how came now, name the steps between, just a bridge of glass, how, why, what, is it lesser, something diminished fine? Could you teach the world sadness, would you,

what, how, why,
still hearts beat pretty & flesh heats fine, is there a formula not in books but drifting fancies to tell,

creatures dreaming, many musics, wake, blink, once, twice, breathe, relax, the way is dis-illusion—

“what the fuck does that mean?”
—the way breaks simple to green songs—

“songs are green?”—what shakes pink & new—“now you're talking! young poon, like they say, it's magically delicious!”—the way is dis-illusion, sharper hunger, sharper hunt—

Touch the world again & hear it moan, hear it sigh, want it trigger, want is release—“is it a cult? Will it repeat the *TripTown* disaster? What are the origins of this latest cyber-craze? Our reporters had no luck with trying to interview attendees though theatre employess say they noticed no unusual behavior, nothing to raise a red flag”—creatures dreaming, come fog & ice, signals gone, everything gone, why chase the next song?—“And has this underground phenomena spread elsewhere in youth culture? Some say that there are underground dance

parties, called raves, where scenes from the movie run on large projection screens where once more abstract art was featured”—

New stroke New push
New tighten All explodes new

“While we found nothing to suggest illicit drug use or underage sexual activity, many parents are getting worried. We’ll keep you informed. Back to our studio”—

Creatures dreaming nigh the clearer hours, feel them closer, there were nights when the stars were snowflakes covering earth’s chill arc, creatures dreaming turn another side, blood warms blood, there was an hour called Void & another called bliss, & the many without fruit between—Preacher has left all he had, it was so close, he was so close, they never knew, they never knew, only held their own wishes, plastered them on a dearly held image of me, they never knew, oh—by science & faith the world slurs on, its dirtiest, noisiest denizens—Til dawn, everything dreaming, everything closer—I may be turning back toward you tonight, Genny, the warnings may not be enough, there was more, I knew it once, they lured me & I believed awhile—what will be the morrow, what comes? I know only one place to look for you, the door through which I did not go, you sitting there, waiting, waiting—

Creatures dreaming to the last, still rutless of time’s stone idea, Bowie on a bus, scribbling, the world a feeding plain & golden nuzzling rest, it took him no time to assemble his spy apparatus, his clothes, his tools, still life need not explain, he knows Christa will be confused but safe, left her in the one place he trusts with the one person he trusts there, simple, she’s with Gretta, he scribbles on, the several hour trip ahead barely enough, what’s struck or carried off tonight will fuel another day’s fruit, another mewling babe, he is readying for the White Woods, for what’s in them, for more than that, his message to Gretta simple, “care for her til I return & claim you both” & he means this in more ways than—he signed it “Do-Right” to remind her of something, something she would remember & be sure of him—

Within walls, men combat for bread &
mercy, ask, take, contrive truths in
tomes to bear the nameless, conjure
a way to play out well, fall in hope—

Within walls, men batter hope for more
coins, heavier fists, smack, roar, make
new truths for this hour & bastards &
lies for the next, turn to wires, wall off warmth

Withering walls, men scatter when a bomb
falls, then one rises & points toward
the sky & says BEWARE!, fist, fail,
no truth but fear, tremble, sheep, tremble

Wicked walls, close out the world's
infinite tongues & yellowing skies,
clutch, mob, you will never know
peaceful solitude, love is not enough

—dream too, in finest hours, croon worlds together. Close, dear, let us croon together. Astride
bombs & berries, believing hunger better than most, no answers but instructions to keep
moving. Let-us-croon-together-or-die.

Croon together, toward a world's great song, will it be in dreams, what thought in these warring
years, croon together, there will be other years, other songs

What could be, other years, distinguish what's going to happen from what isn't necessary, oh
high spread the night across the countless restless faces & given them a moment, a free one, do
some unexpected magic with it,

oh high, the world isn't hard enough for its many cruelties, too much flesh, too much sweet
hunger, too many cross & null, cross & magnify, cross & double—

if I can't, oh high, then yes, one way or another, yes—not give away the rest—

the night noises with bright, tinkling
want, it comes, it comes, twice
now, beg all, soft, close, croon—
soon, crawling, very soon—

Creatures dreaming tonight between the drifts, what of? What for? What else in the cold, close
night, what else. Dreams of grain, of warmth, of union, what of? What for? The instructions
deep in tell so, near the warmth, near the blood, hunger is a phalanx of needs & demands.
Winter's cold, & colder still in a few hours, creatures dreaming, drifts cross the road, how few
new answers collect & stay. What to do then, waking in want, dreaming in wish. What to do.

Little salves the closest wounds but still flesh becks pretty & hearts heat fine. What's shared
most often is in the absence, the gaps, what another brings & offers. Creatures dreaming, many
musics, a thousand highs & still the night nudges, go on, click them bones together! The way
is disillusion, the way breaks simple to green songs, what shakes pink & new. What instructs
from cells, what from regret, what from the world's squeeze to move?

Touch the world again & hear it moan, hear it sigh, want is trigger, want is release. Want tells
nothing, demands all, some shuck it into a costume & call it God. Creatures dreaming, come
the fog & ice, signals gone, everything gone, why chase the next song? It will be the perfect
one, all will end, all will begin. It's true. Cells & regret say so, the world squeezes toward it.
The next one. The next.

New stroke, new push, new tighten, & all explodes new. All explodes new, oh fuck come on,

the world is bleeding, shots firing north & not-north, there is no escape but a six foot hole, none, creatures dreaming nigh the clearer hours, turn another side, blood warms blood, by science & faith. Close, closer, feel the hand, the fur, the nest, call it faith, call it something within words long gone said or maybe unsaid, & til dawn everything dreaming, everything closer, what will be the morrow? What comes? Same world, new world, some join in, some step off & gone.

Creatures dreaming to the last, still rutless of time's stone idea, that line came to me one night I was really high & words buzzed around my live carcass, still the world a feeding plain & golden nuzzling rest, oh save me, haha, fooledya, did you think I need saving? C'mon Preacher let's find a hooker & some blow, we'll share, life need not explain tonight to either of us, right? What's struck or carried off tonight will fuel another day's fruit, another mewling babe. Another, another, til every name is used.

Within walls, men combat for bread & mercy, ask, take, contrive truths in tomes & raise beams to the sky by way of question & demand, contrive tomes to bear the nameless I say, Bowie, Christa, Dr Knickerbocker, Mickey Mouse, Beatles Dead But 2 Live on Stage! We play out in hope, we must, we dream, we croon worlds together. Some will gnaw us dry. Some may save us, save something.

When we first all met, all sat together, it was in a sort of dream. Soft of, I say, because not all of us were strictly speaking asleep.

Yet there we were, the six of us, at that table, in that hotel room, finally, & we were playing a game although, again strictly speaking, we were playing an impossible dream game—it was a reality-altering game, & we weren't competitors, were, in fact, partners in this matter—

We concentrated for awhile on the game, saying little, in that beautiful hotel room one could ask: does it exist? Was it, strictly speaking, a dream-hotel? Was one of us dreaming this & the others in waking life unaware?

Maya spoke first. Of course. She sighed, put down her hand of cards, & said, "I have to know more. Is that why we're here? To meet each other & know more why, *what* we're doing?"

Bowie nodded. "I don't think we have much time either. We may not be all together again ever."

Charlie Pigeonfoot said quietly, "This is all part of *Remoteland*, I know it. It's OK. I don't live anywhere else anymore."

Genny stood up, angrily. "This doesn't belong to you. None of it. *We* don't belong to you. We're sharing this thing between us."

Jack nodded. "My turn, I suppose. We all knew this room was coming. I think we all had clues. Let's examine it thoroughly, & then make a plan. As Bowie said, this might be it."

"But what is any of it?" asked Maya. "My life keeps changing, it keeps folding back on itself. I don't know how to explain it otherwise."

The others nodded again & were surprised at their agreement.

Not a word left, for now, they scattered around the large room looking for something. A clue to return with from this dreaming.

Creatures dreaming between the drifts, take it slow here, strike a long arcing note, look over the prison & pleasures of flesh, what see? What clue? Over, not better nor freerer, but raise up a some & let the sheen of girl skin in & translucent shadows, the craze for beauty in a bluebird's feather, the hard tremor of music, look over, how even small objects have their affecting music, up, over, the salty tidal hustle, the nightly rhythm by which dreams campaign every soul for a wider thought, stumble into a strange patch, make it hold! Make it last! Dreams of teaching foods, feeding heart, unions freeing, unending, what of? what for?

Winter's cold, & colder still in a few hours, a story's told of a man who left his blizzard dead car, his huddle of kin, walked hours for aid, he was scared, he knew what he had to do, & the hours, & the hours, winter's cold, & colder still in a few hours, the river too far to tramp across, trees telling no path but why would they, nowhere to go when you're always at home, the curse is sentiment, a lean into memory, into sadness, weary now, weary, & more trees, & more, the hours & their hours, & theirs, dreaming, drifts cross the road, over there, so close, over there, so close,

how few new answers
collect & stay—but in
wish—little salves the closest wounds but still flesh beats hearts wreck—time—the way is disillusion, the way breaks to pink & green songs, drifting fancies, many gaps, creatures dreaming, many musics, touch the world again & hear it moan, hear it sigh—what instructs by shadow, by prejudice's manacle, by world's sucking corrode & pushing invent? touch—the—world—again—want—is—trigger—want—is—say again?
want—is—∞—again—want—is——is—
is—is—is—is—is—is—is—is—is—is—

I was right down, lost, & fell into this dream, it explained a lot, & nothing too, which I think is why I liked it, why I returned to this page tonight—

in it, a boy was riding a bike, mounted in a wooden frame, & as he rode, the clouds around him riled more & more, & this led to rain on the earth below,

there had never been rain & neither men nor women had hair upon their heads, the rain caused it, the growth of hair upon their bald heads, that was how it happened, according to this dream which woke me before I opened my eyes, & I've been better since, another dream came of riding light beams, but not touching them & this made no literal

 but it was what was in
dream & so I trust its
truth in some sense, some way it is true—

the light glares here in different ways & I think about this book & about Art & about reality & I don't know, really, what to make of any of it—I seem to have been corporeal for nearly 43 years, moving about a corporeal world, the invisible present but often very obscurely so my kind takes to words like God & love & family & war—none of them intrinsic to any but my kind—yet these ideas press all around & seem real, seem true—

details in this world are countless but really sum to naught—like numbers there is no end & no final truth—

the men now who move maps will soon be dust & move no more—they don't act like pending dust—

I ask everyone to stay in the hotel room—they pause, they look at me—they've never seen me before—

"I'm Raymond. I write this story about all of you. I don't know what relation that gives us."

"I'm Maya."

"I know. You were in the previous book too."

"Are you God?"

"No. I'm a man with pen & paper."

"What am I?"

"In this world you are a girl, young, bright. Confused. Sometimes sad."

"Could you kill me? Or change me into something else?"

"Maybe. But it would not efface that you existed."

"What if you burned my pages? All of ours?"

"I would know. I've read about some of you on the radio."

"Some? What about the rest?"

"Not yet."

"Why are you here?"

"I used to be in these stories. I missed them."

"Oh."

We sit at the table they were at earlier playing their reality-altering game. This time they sit with me.

"What was the game?"

"We don't know. No rules. The cards were blank."

"How did you play?"

"We didn't. We were hoping something would happen. It didn't. So we were leaving."

"When you came."

I turn back pages & review. "That's not what I wrote."

"You wrote that we were playing a reality-altering game."

"Yes."

They laugh. "And we altered reality!"

I nod. They laugh again. Their laughter gets louder, shakes, blank cards fly everywhere, the room shakes & shakes again, begins to fall away, I don't know how to hold it together. I don't know anything.

It stops. What's possible is not sayable.

I take a breath, & resume.

What then, next, a story becomes aware of itself, & changes without me, what then, next? Each character is caught in a tangle of events & decisions, each commanded some moments & dragged along by others, each his passing & deepening labyrinthine story, toward what? Any?

Yes, toward—for fiction allows a propulsion, a shaping & speeding of events toward—

much as there are tangents, there is a toward, or towards—

I live in these pages as much as outside them, we are not separate in any meaningful way, when I open this book, we together *resume*, but other times we both live on, this world its unknown autonomies as mine—

A question I've wondered often: is this book's world, this series of books' world mine own, or is it otherwise? In mine, a major war is happening in the Middle East, a horrific disaster created by a powerful, mediocre man. My race's planet is suffering by our abuse, & tries to stop the coming calamity have not succeeded yet—yet—

Would this book's world resonate more or less by each parallel it bears with my world?

My book, my own knowledge, knows truths, propels by truths, only some in my world believed—the world was not contrived in seven days by a god-man who later created a man-god to punish & punish again humanity, who in turn punished & punished again each other & all other existence on earth—

This book believes in the existence of non-human intelligent life, in the powerful reality of dreams, the great tool psychedelia in its many forms, the sentience of trees & other plants, animals, oceans, mountain cliffs, lightning, dusks, the unity of mind & body, call this unity soul, & the continuance of each beyond their dissolving hour, bodies to feed back into the soil, minds to move along elsewhere, somewhere—

Yet—is this a different world or the simple prejudices of the pen-wielder?

What is the Bridge of Glass, the White Woods? What is Luna T's Cafe or the Ampitheatre deep within it? What is *RemoteLand* or was *TripTown*?

Are these simply pages or more?

What for, what toward?

A gesture, a flick, a movement in & out of shadows, swiftly, & each is again dispatched to his and her labyrinthine place, a clue given, now carry along without a missed step.

Mr. Bob the barman fetches me my pale blue Dallas Cowboys mug full of diet soda & ice. I nod, smile at him. He returns my gesture. On the TV mounted behind the bar in the corner a fire bursts out, spitting its sparks beyond the screen, spelling SING DEEPER

To be continued in Cenacle | 72 | April 2010





Judih Haggai

thoughts fly apart
body unhinges
a new leaf unfolds

bereft
transience of all things
a broken chain

plastic garbage bag
dog hopes for treats
sudden love affair

sack of peanuts
visitor raids my store
beak by beak

alas a farewell
i stand at the gate
and wish

stretch the night into sunstream
row the smooth sounds of now
a choir of birds and sassafras

still a bird sings
morning breaks to a lone song
distant crow responds

body wakes
mind wakes
heart longs for infinity

a thousand haiku
trickle down the mountainside
morning shower

body levitates
my only response
is to laugh

one more day till dawn
two more days till morning
then suddenly, yesterday

roll awake
softly merge with morn
if it's attached, it's your body

.

Christopher Patrick Gose



World's Window: Ruminations Entheonautic and Otherwise, Being an Account of My Travels in the New World

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 70 | October 2009
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03/23/2009 Iquitos, Peru

"We have no idea what we are"
—J'allaludin Rumi

I awoke this morning with some attenuated reservations about spending two months in the jungle; more reflections than reservations really. Yesterday I struggled with homesickness, though I wouldn't call it "sickness" per se—more like home-discomfort, like I had eaten too much green chili. Yesterday I spent time chatting with a good friend who has been in communication with Ram Dass over recent months. Ram Dass made an interesting comparison between the ayahuasca seekers of today and the "starry-eyed" LSD-enthusiasts of the 1960s. An interesting comparison in the sense that the third eye is often referred to as the "star of the east," a five-pointed star wreathed in blue light—the original "starry eye." Nonetheless, I can't disagree with the suggestion that ayahuasca seekers today share a certain excessive enthusiasm and naïvete with those seekers inspired by the first big wave of psychedelia in the '60s—and we all know burnouts from that era who eventually lost the wind in their sails. The issue of MDMA came up, with both of us agreeing that somewhere between the euphoric push of MDMA in the early '80s, and the research chemical fad of the late 90s, something had been lost. Last year I re-evaluated the role of MDMA in my life, and came to the resolute conclusion that it had not



Iquitos

been a particularly beneficial influence. Over the years, I have settled on psychotropic plants because it has consistently been my experience that there really and truly is something magical about the plants.

I think perhaps the real power of MDMA and the phenethylamine class of research chemicals is in research and therapy. I often seem to play devil's advocate in regards to science and therapy as areas of human inquiry, though I'm not particularly antagonistic to either science or therapy. The dichotomy between what I have described in this journal as the "shamanic-mystical" worldview, and the worldview born from scientific understanding, is perhaps overstated. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche criticized the Christian worldview of his age as being "impervious to philology," and I believe similar criticisms can be made when it comes to that worldview born from the "age of reason."

Derived from the Greek terms φίλος (*philos*), meaning "loved, beloved, dear, friend," and λόγος (*logos*), meaning "word, articulation, reason," philology often pertains to the historical development of language; Nietzsche also pointed out a tendency towards ossification in thinking itself (an idea that arguably foreshadows the notion of "cognitive philology"). More generally, Nietzsche points towards a tendency to cogitate impervious to the metaphysical assumptions at the root of one's thought process.

In truth, it is neither science nor reason that I object to—it is those forms of ossified thinking that refuse even the possibility of non-ordinary sources of gnosis and understanding. Experience has compelled me toward the necessity of remaining open to sources of information not always consistent with reason in its current and conventional conception. Parmenides of Elea, who lived around 475 B.C., wrote of:

The one [path] on which mortals, knowing nothing, wander, two-headed, for helplessness in their breasts guides their wandering minds and they are carried, deaf and blind alike, dazed, uncritical tribes, for whom being and not-being are thought the same and yet not the same, and the path of all runs in opposite directions. For never shall this be proved: that things that are not are. But do restrain your thought from this path of inquiry, and do not let habit, born from much experience, compel you along this path, to guide your sightless eye and ringing ear and tongue. But judge by reason the highly contentious disproof that I have spoken.

Reason is quite a transparent, mutable, and mercurial concept that suggests a mysterious and unknowable richness. It is not reason that I object to, but those manners of thinking which deny the possibility of what is truly mysterious.

03/28/2009 Iquitos, Peru

We've spent a substantial amount of time and money exploring the Shipibo textile forms, and experience and intuition tells me that this is a uniquely marketable item stateside. Furthermore, I have set myself to the task of hashing out the psychological and visionary implications of the design forms embodied by the Shipibo art style. I strongly feel the visionary realm is the ultimate source and inspiration for all uniquely innovative and original artistic expression—as you might hear a particularly innovative artist like Van Gogh being described as "visionary" or "ahead of his time." It seems like what is truly original is received as a gift from the source

of vision in the old tradition of Romantic genius. This perspective towards the broadening and deepening of genres has been the hallmark of truly great artists since the Renaissance who began to sign their artwork. Prior to the Renaissance, art was generally believed to be directly inspired by the divine and in no need of signature; hence, the genres were generally more formulaic and scripted. Still, many prominent artists of nineteenth and twentieth centuries (including Alfred Stieglitz) ceased signing their artwork at a certain point in their careers.

Shipibo artwork bears no signature but, instead, bears the mark of the visionary realm. The Shipibo-Conibo people describe the perception by which their art form descends into physical form as “seen from the spirits and projected onto the body.” I have been surprised to notice that several of the color schemas used in hip-hop and graffiti art seem to reflect Shipibo art, which is quite ancient; while it is said there is “nothing new under the sun,” this reflection points to the possibility of art as a sort of universal emotional and visionary language that truly speaks from and to the heart—an art form more primeval and archetypal. There are indications that the designs of Shipibo artwork—as inspired by ayahuasca visions—are in fact non-analytic and non-linear designs flashed before the eyes of the shaman, who is really the artist in ancient cultures. Such tessellations further reflect the absolute and infinite, suggesting a domain of experience beyond our own. Art in the Shipibo-style is a form of therapy that speaks directly to the deepest and most profound realms of the human psyche—art seems to have originally served the function of healing the psyche.

For the Shipibo, in the ayahuasca vision, the Nishi Ibo spirit projects the luminescent geometric Shipibo designs in front of the shaman’s eye, luminous and complete visions covering everything within sight. As soon as the floating networks of web-like hallucinations descend into the shaman’s lips and halo, a melody is issued corresponding to the tiny visions. These textiles are the captured essence of the “visible language” hallucination complex at the heart of the DMT reality (Terence McKenna writes of this idea). The hummingbird spirit, or Pino, described as the “writer” or “secretary” among the higher spirits, hovers above the patient and projects the pattern into the patient’s body, bringing healing. This art is, in fact, medicine.

Let me suggest the possibility of a perspective on pop and hip hop art that broadens their horizons to include the folk styles of *all* marginalized sub-populations on this planet. Several of the most successful artists of the twentieth century have taken just this approach—masters such as Andy Warhol, David Bowie, and Peter Dinklage. I would argue that much of the “edge” of hip-hop art derives from its cultural marginalization as an art form. When I look at Shipibo-Conibo visionary art, I see tribal art, folk art. Personally, I’d lose money just to host a gallery exhibition with this artwork properly mounted. Life *is* art, and I intend on living it.

03/31/2009 Iquitos, Peru

The last week has seen me re-hashing family dynamics surrounding the trust fund that I rely on for my income. Our monthly check was serendipitously lost in the mail, and the whole *gestalt* of insecurities and anxieties that plagued my mother up to the day she died came crashing down on me. Ultimately, I simply have to let it go and plunge into the pulsating and singing symphony that is the jungle—and, at its heart, the mother of all plants, ayahuasca. We have less than a week and, after so much malingering and waiting, I have never so much looked forward to puking my guts out. Honestly, we have put so much heart and effort in coming this far and, while I considered turning around, even an ego so trenchant as my own cannot escape

the momentum and gravity of this experience. In the end, I have necessarily abandoned any hope of being understood or understanding.

My mother spent much of her life waiting to live it, always waiting for the check. People seem to fall into one of two categories in regards to their approach to life. Certain people sit back and watch as everything falls to shit and, in fact, secretly hope that it does. Seemingly satisfied with the simple routine of job, the two and a half kids, the mortgage, they sabotage it all unconsciously by crying “terror” or “victim” when—in truth—the terror is their own mind. Then when everything falls to shit, they whine and complain to no end, a great and flaccid phallus—refusing to entertain their lives as something that approaches incomprehensible.



Iquitos

Then there are those who seize life by the swollen clitoris and rub it into feverish and orgasmic ecstasy. I fancy myself of the second variety—a real Don Juan, pshaw—but, more realistically, I live both lives simultaneously, waltzing upon the tip of a chiliocosmic complexity, a singular plenum. Gazing from this world into the Other, here at the window between worlds. In fact, neither world exists without the other—nor are there worlds without the window between them, the mirador and watchtower from which the two rivers flow into one surreal immensity, beheld as an empty passing by.

One night stands out particularly as a diadem of my mother's heart. The living room tastefully lit, a feral and languid blanket of golden light, and always perfumed with the scent of candles. She really loved candles. Sinking into the plush couch, frothing like a pillow of fantasy and

ocean brine, we stayed up all night and fell asleep sometime in the morning. I remember most clearly the image, gracing the cover of *National Geographic*—my mother always wanted to appear sophisticated—of a scarlet macaw.

At the risk of waxing loquacious, let me simply suggest that this image speaks to me of a deathless motherhood which cradles the world at its breast. Here where the birds have a language like angels singing, screams like a consuming fire into the night. Mother, the divine feminine, and Anima, a tryptic expression of the life and death of the body. Birth, reproduction and death—the one incomprehensible letting go that utterly and completely squares the circle. The three times I have seen my mother since her death, I have seen nothing at all, excepting a transparent world without substance that singularly flows from her passing into mine.

04/07/2009 Genero Herrera, Peruvian Amazonas



Infinite Light building

Last night we drank ayahuasca—the vine of the soul—for the first time. Exceeding my expectations, ayahuasca’s wisdom is only surpassed by the grace and elegance with which it heals the wounded heart. Over the years, I have worked in a range of transformative traditions, including Buddhist meditation, medical science, hatha yoga and Zen. I have lived in monasteries, meditation centers, and retreated with the likes of Thich Nhat Hahn and Dr. Roshi Joan Halifax. I have filled myself with all manners of intellectual wisdom through books and research articles. I have investigated pharmaceutical science and psychology. The simple truth, for me, is that ayahuasca really and truly completely blows all of them out of the water—in terms of skill and efficiency, it is unparalleled as a vehicle of healing and spiritual development

A soft and powerful warmth of light, wholly welcoming, passed over me in the initial phases as The Medicine began working in my body and mind. As our shaman sang *icaros* (healing songs) over the first several hours, the visions were subsumed within a powerful and reassuring presence—a thick black serpent moving with an elegantly powerful and healing grace—then transforming into a pleroma of collonades reaching up into the palm-thatched roof—then dissolving into scintillae of light:

“You can trust this completely,” The Medicine said with a clarity of perception and strength, “I am here to heal you.”

The *icaros* brought a lot of light into the first ceremony, and I was completely at home in the trance. Some misconceptions I had were dispelled regarding The Medicine:

Misconception 1: *Ayahuasca tastes terrible.*

It’s not that bad. I have imbibed things that taste much worse—it tastes kind of like bitter hot chocolate.

Misconception 2: “*The Purge*” is exclusively physical (i.e. vomiting)

What is referred to as “The Purge” is the process by which dense and heavy energies are brought into the light and *purged* from the unconscious. The physical dimension of The Purge constitutes a miniscule fraction of the purgative process. This medicine is—in my experience—the planetary healer par excellence, the *sine qua non* of medicine. “The Purge” is the phenomenological dimension of what ayahuasca truly is.

In my first experience, I very clearly perceived the light and power of the *icaros* as pressing out the dark energies of shame, guilt, and, especially, doubt. I saw quite clearly that these energies had established a personality dynamic within me, preventing me from relating to others in a meaningful and sincere way. “All of these people are crazy,” I would hear in these energies, and see the walls I had erected in coming to know others.

A couple things became crystal clear regarding The Medicine. First, in the context of the shamanic healing traditions of the Amazon, ayahuasca is seen within a spiritual cosmology. In this cosmology, the vine is directly perceived as a personified and spiritual teacher. So when ayahuasca is referred to as “The Medicine,” it is being designated as a spiritual presence that initiates the neophyte into the various “levels” and grades of spiritual perception. This is not a matter of rational understanding, as the very substance being purged tends to reside within the unconscious mind. My experience seems to indicate that the more irrational the manner in which ayahuasca tends to be working within one’s system, the deeper The Purge. This argument extends from the fact that what is *most* unconscious tends to be that which we are most unaware of, that which does *not* fit into our current level of conscious understanding. This is not to say that the unconscious is never subject to the rigor of rational thought and reason—simply that what is currently unconscious does not reside within the framework of what is currently rational thought for us within this moment. What this perspective emphasizes is that we must be humble to the present moment, and surrender the sort of arrogance and hubris that pretends to understand everything, be it scientific or spiritual. Ayahuasca sees beyond the metaphysical assumptions that tend to obfuscate hyper-materialistic—including certain scientific—and hyper-spiritualistic modes of perception. The jungle *breathes* as a living presence—for a solid hour I heard an angelic presence singing deep within the forest, compelling me into a period of “reality testing.” “What is this sound really? Truly, what is this voice deep within the jungle?”

When the *icaros* stopped, The Purge began for me though I didn’t vomit. For all of the difficulty of The Purge, there is something very beautiful and wonderful about it—something in me just knew that this was okay, that this was the deepest healing a person could go through. The cosmological framework in which ayahuasca is used reinforces this perception—it gives you exactly what you need, and only so much as you can take. During this period, The Medicine posed a question that has since become something of a personal koan for me: “Is pursuit of the Truth worth all of the suffering and uncertainty?”

My answer would be “yes,” but this answer does not penetrate into the depths of the question for me. What this question has become is a clarion call in developing my own faculties of spiritual discernment and investigation. It’s not a question with an intellectual answer, but instead one felt directly as an intuitive sense of the nature of The Medicine, The Purge, and the unconscious mind. What this question showed me through The Medicine is

my own potential, what the future *could* be.

Specifically, this question allowed me to probe the difficulties that have evolved in my relationship with my father, suggesting a link between my own struggle and my place within the revolution of consciousness as it is being mediated by The Medicine—but Medicine in the macrocosmic sense of what medicine actually is, and Purge in the sense of what The Purge actually is: the Truth. The Medicine is the infinite light of compassion and healing, the one and great spiritual Apocalypse that is the central gravity and mystery of life, especially our own lives. The Purge is the manifestation of The Medicine within the time-bound dimension of cause-and-effect karmic conditioning and personal suffering—the light comes to bear on the darkness, and the darkness is purged. The alchemists refer to this central mystery of the path of the wounded healer as the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, the *Lapis Lazuli*, the *Uniao Spiritus*. The two become one and we are healed.

“Where does The Purge go?” I asked The Medicine on the first night.

The truth is that The Purge and The Medicine are one “heal thyself” and the clear vision to which this eternal and infinite light testifies: our lives. “Seek and you shall find”: I have—finally—found my life and destiny. No one understood what I was doing, even mocked it—but this is the story of a man who journeyed deep into the jungle for healing, and was healed. A man has the right to heal himself, to stand in his truth. Here I am, as ever, still standing.



Ayahuasca cooking

04/19/2009 Iquitos, Peruvian Amazonas

Since shortly after the first ceremony, I have been mostly unable to write—The Medicine has suffused me with a guiding presence whose voice and vision for my life seems to have eclipsed my own. I have been in the midst of personal purging, and quite often The Purge extends out for several days beyond exposure to The Medicine. Several types of purging

characterize the effects of ayahuasca on the system over time. There are fear purges, which seem quite common for me. This particular purge is characterized by a sense of urgency, fight-or-flight reflex, and feelings of constriction in the chest. There are rage purges, which are more caustic in nature, and seem to revolve about regions of stored trauma—emotional, psychological, and physical—local to the solar plexus. This purge occurred for me during the third and most powerful ceremony, and was experienced as a clearing of the solar plexus. Doubt purges, according to Meghan—apprentice and intimate partner to our shaman—, generally seem to involve thought spirals fixated on one theme. They frequently concern uncertainty regarding the people one is drinking with, life-course decisions, and the place of The Medicine in one's life and experience. My most common emotional purge at this point has been sadness, which is experienced as a sense of heaviness and malaise that is being squeezed like toothpaste out of my system. Sadness purges occurred uniformly towards the tail-end of the primary visionary experience, often initiating the transition from the *mediado* (a Spanish word that roughly translates as “meditation”; in ayahuasca shamanism *mediado* is the period of visions) to the next phase of The Medicine. Then certain purges seem to work on the physical body.

I think it's important to emphasize again that The Purge is not necessarily entirely about letting go and releasing. It also seems to involve the capacity to look into areas of blockage and recognize in our woundedness a certain strength. Where I have purged rage and anger, I have also connected with the idea of the spiritual warrior that has been a guiding light in my search for the Truth. In this sense, The Purge can develop one's capacities of wise discernment.

Our second ceremony geared itself towards a specific area of focus and purge. The *mediado* itself came on quickly, hard and strong; I was entirely overcome by a thick, black wave of energy. The visions themselves were unsettling, rapidly oscillating and pressing me back down onto my pad. The sounds of barking dogs and crowing roosters—yes, they crow at all times of the day and night—reverberated, echoes of the Apocalypse. Again I heard the voice of a woman singing deep in the forest, and some singing trees—four notes, spaced and rolling over the jungle canopy. Visions morphing then into a space I have dubbed “the killer clown,” a madhouse of trickery and quite alarming.

“You know, vomiting can be very efficient in purging things like this, if you'd like to push through it,” The Medicine said.

“Would you like to vomit?” It gave me the choice.

“Absolutely,” I replied, quickly sitting up, spinning around, and grabbing the bucket.

I have never been so happy to puke so hard—it came up strong, hard, and was gone. Spitting into the bucket, I felt no desire to wash my mouth out with water. I felt so much better. Immediately our shaman Luco lit some tobacco and calmly walked to my side, *chacapa* (a sort of rattle made from palm-thatch) in hand. With firm and precise snaps, our shaman rapidly toggled the rushing sweeps of the *chacapa* around my head. At times, the *chacapa* transformed in a blue and whistling hummingbird (in retrospect I have realized this hummingbird was the blue bird from my coca vision), flitting about the web of space with miraculous dexterity and agility of motion. The *icaró* was strong and grounded, solid arboreal energies poured off Luco, clearing The Purge and creating a field of protection. I saw Luco as embodying The Medicine—his *icaró* seemed to go on particularly long, after which he blew tobacco smoke

into my crown, burping, and pressing some of his own energy in. Luco blew over my chest and back. Then, asking me to join outstretched hands, he blew smoke down my palms again, burping energy down the cupped tube of my palms. I felt light and clean. Interestingly enough, after this purge, the *mediado* and visions entirely receded—quite early—leaving me with the more dense and physically anchored energies of the various trees in the brew, and especially the *sanango* root cooked into the ayahuasca. The evening closed with a relatively light sadness purge as I lay under the mosquito net over my bed. Certain purges are very calm, nurturing and reassuring. This sadness was such a wisdom.

That next morning, shortly after sunrise, the shaman recommended we bathe in the fresh waters of the river as a way to wash The Purge off completely. We lounged about lazily in hammocks throughout the day, eating lightly and talking softly amongst ourselves. With each ceremony, the group grew in silence and companionship, forging connections gilded by tightly woven synchronicities, and a mounting sense of compassion for one another.

All members of the group experienced our third ceremony as the strongest. I have yet to develop the type of grammar that communicates the nature of the sort of *mediado* we moved through during the first three hours of this experience. Three of us in the room dropped into a synchrony-space, clearly aware of one another's thoughts and energy fields. It felt like dropping out of the frenetic and mechanical obsessions of my mind, and the conditioned mind and pain-body of American consciousness. This sense of dropping out was simultaneously accompanied by an oceanic and surging tide, deep and satisfying, from the wellspring of consciousness. The visions swayed soft and purple over the clear waters, delicate petals rotating as they cast warm and infinite light crossing rotund geometries. More than anything, this ceremony instilled a sense of hope for future possibilities, revealing the potential of a life guided by the light of Truth and compassion. It was all so obvious, so clear.

This deep light of The Medicine appeared to invite and reveal certain spirits. In the depth of the visions, a very clear psychic channel opened up between Gratefulbear and me. I sent her love and affection, and she received it. During this period of openness between us, we shared a hallucination complex in which the mushroom spirit came to us. The Medicine would invite in this spirit, then draw us back from the scene and deliver a sort of narrative. While separate messages were given to each of us regarding the mushroom, the visionary component was largely shared. "The mushroom is also a way, but it can be valuable to really exclusively focus on one medicine for certain healing," it communicated telepathically. "The mushroom tends to guard its secret with a certain jealousy that can be tricky to work with, if you are not skillful with it," said The Medicine. The communication was perfect, and the message insightful.



Genero Herrera

As the *mediado* passed, there was a moment and The Medicine was very clear. “Okay, I think you are ready for a bit more of this,” it said, and a thick sadness purge began pressing out of me like snakes. I felt as if the light had been invited so deeply into my system that it was massaging and drawing out the purge. The *mediado* intermittently returned in deep waves throughout the night, and I was hallucinating well past the time we again bathed in the river that next morning.

In the time between ceremonies, bonds rapidly developed between those who had come together to heal and learn from The Medicine. Miracle stories abounded, not the least of which was the story of our wheelchair-bound companion, Theresa, who had been almost entirely paralyzed after a snowboarding accident had damaged her spine in the cervical area. After several years of fruitless searching within the range of Western medicine she turned to alternative medicines, including ayahuasca in Peru. She credits ayahuasca with re-wiring areas of her nervous system, returning sensation to most of her body, and allowing for increasing functionality in her hands. Her presence was so sweet, solid and reassuring. Her gorgeous smile was set below the clearest blue eyes I have ever seen.

Margie and Erin were a couple on a multi-year spiritual odyssey that had taken them all the way across the United States, building escape velocity, then quantum leaping out of country and across Ecuador to Peru. In Peru they discovered ayahuasca, which Margie credits as the “turning point” in her struggle with diagnosed bi-polar schizophrenia.

The final ceremony was largely physical except for a very brief period of *mediado* centered around extracting “fear bubbles” that entered as a result of a couple of mushroom experiences where I went overboard with dose and blacked out. I have been told that because of one’s degree of openness, and the lack of protection in such a state, certain unwholesome energies can enter, and form sacks. The Medicine associated these energies with the mushroom, and invoked the mushroom itself. For perhaps ten minutes, I was in a state virtually indistinguishable from perhaps two grams of potent *cubensis*. The driving and alien quality was unsettling, so I invited The Medicine in—it revealed these sacks of fear throughout my chest and began removing them. “These sacks are causing the rashes you get in your armpits, they are full of grief and suffering.”

As it happened, a week after this purge I mysteriously broke out—late one evening—with a very large rash that extended from deep within my armpit across my chest and back. It didn’t itch at all, but was extremely unsightly and covered my body. I took several showers, blew *mapacho* smoke over it and, after perhaps four hours, it completely vanished. As it was disappearing, I distinctly saw a presence over my right shoulder that firmly tapped my shoulder and was gone. I may have been—in some sense—possessed. When it lifted, I was more peaceful and solid than I can ever remember being. My anxiety is pretty much gone, which is a real miracle. I feel myself less bothered by daily situations and other people. I am more social and comfortable in social situations. The therapeutic impact of The Medicine is unmistakable. We are leaving tomorrow for another session. Miracles and healing abound:

limpia, limpia ayahuasca
puro, puro medicina

04/20/2009 Iquitos, Peruvian Amazonas

Yesterday, shortly before we were to leave Iquitos for the ayahuasca center at Genero Herrera, I made the snap decision to stay put and continue recovering from and integrating our last session with The Medicine. There were some concerns about the intensity and pace of the Infinite Light ayahuasca program approach, and our party—which includes a third person from New Mexico—welcomed the time for rest and reflection. There were several signs encouraging this course of action, and things have opened up nicely since. We have decided to rent a house—out beyond Iquitos in the community of Santa Tomas—with four bedrooms, kitchen, and a backyard that descends straight into a lagoon off the black water Rio Nanay. The water itself is clean. The pace of life, as well as medicine-work, is significantly more in tune with our needs. There are three local *curanderas* serving ayahuasca and other plant medicines—we have been told that they almost exclusively focus on members of the local community instead of gringos. Our new Greek friend Nikolas—who has worked with shamans in the area for fifteen years—said he felt we specifically needed this work and healing, and told us not to open it up to other foreigners. Kind of an interesting development, I look forward to seeing where it goes. In the next several days, we will be gathering supplies to settle in comfortably. I seem to be purging something really deep, perhaps some addiction-energy. I seem to be fairly lethargic; I think the five ceremonies per week was too much. The ayahuasca itself seemed to indicate that two or three per week is my limit. Clearly, I need to work on personal limits.



Genero Herrera

One of my best friends stateside was in touch recently; we're missing friends and friends are missing us. The United States—for all its affluence—can be such a difficult place to live for certain people, especially individuals who seem uniquely constituted as “Scouts” in this time of evolving consciousness and its expanding edges. When I left the United States, it was with a profound sense of urgency. I felt a great deal of strain in having lived in a country that has been at war for seven years. I was plagued with anxiety, uncertain as to the direction which was my heart's path.

4/26/2009 Santa Thomas, Peruvian Amazonas

Last night I dreamt of my mother. There was a swirling buzz of scintillae of light, purple and welcoming. We had built an altar to honor her passing, at the center of which was a book wreathed in purple light. She seemed very pleased that this had come to a conclusion. Next morning our travel companion commented on the “spiritual activity” of the previous night.

After several very harrowing days, we seem to have settled into our new home in Santa Thomas. Tomorrow we will walk up into the deeper jungle and visit our Greek friend Nikolas, who appears remarkably competent in alternative healing and the plant medicines of this area of the Peruvian Amazon. I am feeling optimistic after a rough couple of days. I just walked about the house, blessing each room with fragrant incense, and the sky is dumping a torrential rain right on top of us. The roar on the roof is deafening, and it is quite late. Several things have unfolded in recent days.

Some days back I began chewing coca in the epic style and, at a certain point, blacked out and was incognito for about forty-eight hours. Friends watched me closely, but I was clearly not local to my body and chewing coca constantly. I'm told I visited the market, went out for dinner; I have absolutely no memory of these events. I think the ayahuasca can really make one sensitive in the extreme to other plant energies. I apparently talked little except grunts, and slept a great deal in between. All I remember is chewing some coca, laying down for bed, and then "coming to" forty-eight hours later with people telling me strange stories and giving me strange looks. Somewhat disturbing, really. I'm just glad I was being watched over, and it seems to have served some purpose.

Shortly after emerging from this fugue, I was informed that my stepfather had suffered a cerebellar stroke, which compromised certain motor functionalities but did not leave him paralyzed. He's a tough ol' guy, he'll pull through this and be the better for it. He is constantly in my heart these days.

We gathered supplies for the house, and cooking materials: pots, basic amenities, food stock including lentils and quinoa, produce, buckets for washing clothes, utensils, towels, necessities. I'm quite tired of the hustle and bustle pace of the Belem market, and look forward to a rest day tomorrow.

Tonight, Gratefulbear and I really settled into this spot, and there was some clarity. I realized that the casual drinking I've been doing on the road is causing a lot of problems and preventing me from reaching this domain of possibility the ayahuasca makes available. So the alcohol is out the window again. I seem to have a genetic predisposition to use alcohol in a destructive way, although it can be quite subtle. The house itself is rustic style, made of polished driftwood and quite spacious, with an immense living area and an open kitchen with ample counter space. Upstairs is a landing—where we've hung hammocks—leading out to a porch overlooking the central park. We surrounded by the Rio Nanay and, excepting for a couple hours of discothèque in the evening, it has become quite a nice place. Tonight we lay in hammocks upstairs and spent gentle time with candles, chewing a little coca and relaxing. Our traveling partner seems to have vanished for the night; not sure where he is directed.

Tonight I discovered a very good method for ingesting coca. One starts with coca powder, then adds a small amount of sodium biphosphate and just enough water to turn it into a paste. The paste is then shellacked across the cheek and left there. I imagine this would be very pleasant with cacao nibs and some sweetening agent, plus tobacco. This may be the way to work with this jungle coca, which is significantly tougher, with thicker and raw leaves. It seems to need something to really get it cooking; the tobacco seems to be the kicker. It feels smoother, calmer—more grounded and clear this way.

05/06/2009 Santa Tomas Peruvian Amazonas

*"Sixty ton angel falls to the earth,
heart of metal and radiant blood."*

—Porcupine Tree

Last night I dreamt I was gazing out the back window over the jungle at a scene as it was being dictated to me by a being like a sorcerer. The sorcerer held a red cloth over the window, and a portal opened in the cloth, revealing a group of flying saucers gently hovering over the dense forest canopy. Grinning mischievously, he said, "the world's window is open to you, whenever you are ready," and I hear knocking, rapid tapping at the doorway. Then, between waking and sleeping, I'm still hearing the tapping at the door. Now awake, I'm sitting up in bed and still hear the knocking. "Who the hell is that so late?" I think to myself, reticent to get up and check the door. But we're out in the middle of nowhere; the street is entirely quiet. Azalea knocks on my bedroom door. "Hey, did you hear that?" he asks, and we both walk downstairs to check the front door. Nothing, but the house is dancing in spiritual energy. We're all wide awake.



Toucan

Since my last experience with the ayahuasca, the extraterrestrial situation has been foremost in my mind. Beyond the animal morphs, visions, and transformations—out past the plant spirits—a doorway opens. A doorway to other worlds, watched over by harbingers of intergalactic and trans-dimensional energy. The harbingers suggest that plants—when fully received—transform us into antennas for energy which we, in turn, hardwire and channel into the collective species. So not only is the act of drinking ayahuasca a plant-animal symbiosis, but that very symbiosis brings our world into the light of all worlds. Returning us to the heart and cradle at the galactic center of our souls, the plants heal alienation from self, society, and world by connecting us to what is most Otherworldly.

As the snakes—black and white, fused and serpentine—ascended the monolithic world-pole, a light went with them. Clear and straight, their path smoothly spun about the central channel and, reaching the top, lit up my crown. "It's an aviary, a birdhouse," I crooned. It is circular and smooth with ovular holes carved out on every side reaching deep into the center of my skull. Then out pops the very white bird I have sensed for years, wings spread in resplendent beauty. Black beak and empty eye sockets lit from within by luminescent and translucent azure light, vision omnipresent and ocular across all senses and out into the beyond. As it moved, the serpentine light followed in time, lighting up the holes with a gentle

and healing warmth, revealing each and every nook of the aviary and spiritual structure of my body. “Your third eye is a landing ground for ascending and descending spirits, a portal.” The bird glided softly about the house, clearing insects and dark energies from my spiritual body. In time, all things transform: all is change, all is flux and light, all is food for the soul’s flight from the corporeal.

Then deep energies start moving from the center of my skull, a window opens and I sense a confluence of inter-dimensional gravities as the inside of my head feels pulled open from the center. A channel opens upwards and there is a thin cloth—made of the most delicate material—that lights up from beyond, and on its surface I see several thin beings. Mantids frenetically scamper at the doorway, peeling back the edges and opening the portal up completely. The beings are linked at the wrist and smiling as they turn in a circle, peering down the dimensional tube and out onto the scene below. “We open the intergalactic energies,” they say, “and when the time is right, you will travel with us to our own starswarm.” I feel them pulling me up through my crown. “Do you hear it?” echoes Azalea. “That low humming, it’s a UFO,” and they quickly vanish. It was brief but very real and quite compelling. The UFO encounters have been very matter of fact, as have those encounters with more spiritual and earth-bound energies. But energy no doubt, something alive and vibrant, beyond the human sensorium, yet contained as a potential within it.

Since this last ceremony, I have been pretty “out there,” really. Perfectly anchored, but something has most definitely been stirred up. More than ever, I am beginning to see there is a truth to these energies that is “realer than real.”

05/08/2009 Santo Tomas, Peruvian Amazonas

Tonight we drink pure ayahuasca-chacrana for the final time here in the jungle. The full moon crowns a sky bejeweled by stars, with Sirius shining bright and blue in the southern sky. Chimes waft through the air, the delicate shimmer of an intelligence best described as transcendent. Today we chewed fresh coca leaves straight off bushes gathered up the Rio Napo. The fresh coca is exquisite, flavored with a gentle menthol. I feel I have arrived at a place of mastery with the coca; it is a powerful ally. The coca specifically seems to accelerate The Purge, perhaps explaining the partnership between coca and ayahuasca envisioned in the Witoto mythologem. My final chew was perfect, a balance of the warming energy of the coca plant and the activating agent. I spent several hours wrapped in the coca trance as I swayed gently in my hammock, thinking: “it’s time for ayahuasca.” Today we cooked our first batch of ayahuasca. Layering fresh vine of the *cielo* variety—a word that translates to mean *heaven* from Spanish—with emerald green *chacrana* and pyramidal *chaliponga*, the aroma of fresh ayahuasca is in the air. Something is opening up within me, a powerful sense of the plants and the world beyond. I feel clear and alive, the pace of things has shot through me and the very rhythms of the jungle coarse through my body. There is no doubt at this point that the transformation is occurring at every level of my being, I feel like a new person.

05/09/2009 Santo Tomas, Peruvian Amazonas

The pure chacrana-caapi brew we imbibed last night—made by the shaman—was hands down the most clear and powerful of the brews thus far. *Suavecita*, in the shaman’s

own words, smooth as silk. There be dragons in this ayahuasca. The onset was particularly slow, taking a full ninety minutes to completely develop. The presence of the old growth vine was quite clear, and the purgative aspect was particularly pronounced on the physical plane. I puked for the first time since the second ceremony, and puked *hard*. As the first set of visions surged, both Azalea and I took a second dose. After gagging down my dose, the visions truly took me away. The night unfolded in a reverie of songs, whistling, and vivid hallucinations.

Early on I was seeing alligators, eyes cold and feline, over the surface of still pools of dark water. For perhaps thirty minutes I moved through a powerful fear purge, releasing yet deeper levels of anxiety and urgency—my heartbeat was strong and steady throughout. Azalea and I sang and whistled together, my first time risking this particular avenue of channel and expression within the trance. The singing facilitates clearing, opening up and protecting the space. At several points during the night, I clearly heard what were definitely spirits. The ruffle of feathers surrounding my head. A scampering up the perpendicular wall.

Azalea opted for a third dose, and just being proximal to his drinking activated nausea for me. Then after he drank, I very clearly tuned into his third dose. As the wave of visions pulsed from his body into our field of synchrony, I said, “There’s something else here. Something I hadn’t noticed before. It’s like a field of our minds.” An antenna extended from my chest, “calling all worlds,” and a galactic sun rose, a beacon in the soul’s dark night. The alligators lurked in their dark waters as the antenna towered from out my crown, a great and ivory monolith. Then, pulsing with energy, I gazed around me in wonder. Cocooned in a shining dome, glistening, and tastefully lit.

“I am the UFO,” it echoed. “Ashes, ashes we all fall down.” Irreverent fits of ecstatic laughter, and the worlds opened before me. Spirits gyrating and beckoning, uncoiling DNA spasms—a seamless fabric—smooth as silk—and the alligators broke free from the genetic matrix and—sprouting wings—took flight. Dragons in sequence taken to avian flight from out the top of my crown, in deep and luminescent scarlet spinning disks through the house and out the roof. “We have lift off,” and it was all so simple and clear.

The galactic vistas opened up as the dragons escaped the well of gravity, re-forging my DNA and creating me anew. World upon world, stacked like books in a library, and open for me to read. What great fortune to have been opened to these dimensions of experience, to have beheld—not believed—the transformation is complete. Renewal. The thread has unwound, a coil of flesh and blood releasing the knot. Seven ceremonies, a full moon and light everywhere.

* * *

It was a clear night in the autumn of 1996 when I gathered with two friends to imbibe the sacred mushroom. We acquired them suddenly through a friend, and ate them with little thought as to set and setting. While the three of us lounged about in the darkened room of a friend from the high school tennis team, the visions developed slowly in rolling waves of light. Unknown to us—and only discovered later that night—the immense and beaming tail of the Hale-Bopp comet shown bright in the evening sky. In our darkened and moonlit cocoon, we sat as the whispering rotunda of the sacred mushroom enveloped us, *pop!*, and it happened simple as that, like some leaping forth. It was utterly miraculous and surprising, and we all simultaneously gasped when it happened.

“My God, did you all just feel that? Are you feeling what’s happening here?” I exclaimed.

All three of us concurred that by some mystery of mind and what is not known, we had dropped into a silver and shining shared hallucination. Lying back, we each and all witnessed as a humming and silver disk, full of the most peaceful and loving light, passed through the room and through our bodies. For hours, the lot of us—eager and intellectual youths—were rendered entirely speechless, our minds wholly tamed by the wisdom surrounding us. The most beautiful vista unfolded, pouring forth into a course of time and phenomena that had lost all meaning to our bemushroomed minds. But more than the visions, the simple awareness of a living and breathing Other eclipsed any and all sensory perturbations, psychedelic or otherwise. After several hours in silent witness to this most miraculous of Beings, it passed and we stepped outside to the gleaming wash of Hale Bopp—my first time seeing the comet—across the night's sky. Our minds boggled, it was an object unidentified, flying through still and empty space. The next morning found me walking in wonder through an oak forest, laughing and smiling at the astounding beauty of this our own world. Stardust escaping across the night's sky.

* * *

This afternoon here in the jungle, and on the tail of our ayahuasca experience, was somewhat sluggish, a normal reaction to several weeks of pushing the envelope emotionally and psychologically. We seem to need to eat more, so have increased our calorie intake. I spoke with a close friend this evening about beta-carboline combinations. He expressed prudent reservation in regards to the psilocybin-harmine synergy specifically. I don't know, I find the vine to be specifically healing from an energetic perspective, as a bridge between the plants. There is certainly something magical to *Banisteriopsis Caapi*, this I cannot deny. But what is its place in terms of tryptamine synergies? The case of Terence and Dennis McKenna in *True Hallucinations* speaks to the destabilizing impact of this particular combination—psilocybin and harmala alkaloids—but is their specific situation representative of this synergy at large? I wonder how the integration period will unfold. Specifically, the re-ordering of DNA seems part and parcel to the effects of the harmala spectrum of alkaloids. It has even been suggested that harmine and harmaline are neurotoxic at some level, though I suspect this may only apply to doses well beyond what is therapeutic. Therapeutic doses may, I suspect, serve in re-building the serotonin system. In my case, as it has been compromised by intensive MDMA use, this may be quite a useful thing. I feel quite good, clear. Crazy but good.

Our tentative plan is to find a place at higher altitude—with a lower temperature—and hunker down for a bit. The effects of the extreme heat seem to be cumulative at a certain level—it can be particularly difficult to sleep well when it's 90 degrees plus, with humidity. Gratefulbear seems particularly worn out—the jungle is quite a rigorous climate for long periods of immersion and travel. These rigors compounded by the focused and regular work with ayahuasca, and we're some tired puppies. But a lot has been cleared, and our spirits are good. We look forward to cooler weather nonetheless.

05/13/2009 Lima, Peru

Several days of manic chaos and we have unexpectedly found ourselves back in Lima. From Iquitos we traveled by plane to Tarapoto, on the frontier of the jungle and a corroder

into the foothills of the Andes mountain range to the West. The temperature and humidity were both significantly reduced as we landed amidst a sun setting over the dark green hills of a sparse highland jungle. The region just south of Tarapoto down the road to Tingo Maria is a major source of the coca exported in paste form to Colombia for processing into pure cocaine for the American market. Certain figures place this region as the source of 65% of the cocaine that is exported to the United States on a yearly basis. As a result, DEA and federal police presence surrounds Tarapoto.

Starting in the early morning on our second day, mobs of marauding *mototaxis* carrying screaming Peruvian protestors flooded the streets. Stripping the vehicles of their roofing and parading them about the central square and throughout the city, the protestors shut down storefronts everywhere they went. Our first Latin American strike. Protesting the presence of oil companies in their native homelands, joined by local Tarapoto residents opposed to drilling and the destruction of clean ground waters in their “city of palms,” theirs is a stance I fully sympathized with in spite of the inconvenience. The markets were closed, the shops, most of the restaurants—those restaurants still left open quickly ran out of food due to the closure of the market. The roads leading in and out of Tarapoto were all blocked, including—on the first day—the entrance to the airport. On more than one occasion I witnessed men speeding about on the back of mototaxis holding wooden and makeshift spears, tipped by affixed nails, and clearly unfriendly to enemies. Local police endured the strike in good humor, calmly overseeing the emotional tide with minimal involvement. For two days we hid out while the strike raged on outside, and on the third day made prompt flight reservations to Lima. Stealing away from our hostel in the late afternoon, our tense mototaxi ride to the airport took a back route, arriving in plenty of time for our flight.

This time, Lima came to us as a momentary relief from the *blitzkrieg* intensity of the Amazon and jungle; the forest is a reality truly more than one could imagine, powerful and overwhelming. Admittedly, a great deal of my time in the jungle was spent exhausted from dehydration and the constant and looming presence of intensely direct sunlight reflecting off each and every surface. The jungle tests your metal every step of the way. Living this close to the bare bones of the physical and natural world casts the heart and soul in pure gold; the jungle “shines.” Very soon I will be in a place to retrospect concerning ayahuasca and the jungle.

A wafting tide of cool mist washed over Lima early this morning. We have eaten particularly well. Earlier in the morning we picked up a good amount of Tingo Maria coca and llipta from the plant market in central Lima. The market was quite hectic, the coca excellent. Tomorrow we head down to Arequipa and the Colca canyon. I knew we would be back here. Then, on to Chile.

05/15/2009 Huacachina, Peru

After an exhausting day in Lima, we bussed last night to Ica—along the southern coast of Peru—and quickly taxi’d to the lagoon at Huacachina. Colonial architecture encircling an idyllic lagoon and further surrounded by looming and pristine sand dunes, Huacachina is the very picture of a desert oasis. The air is warm during the day and flows into cool and stark evenings. Local hotel management has proven particularly friendly, a welcome respite from the gentrified hostility that is Lima. We settled in nicely to a room overlooking the lagoon, tastefully painted in textured reds and yellow. After a substantial dinner, our group fell into a



Huacachina

deep and dream-filled sleep.

I dreamt we had returned to the Amantani island, all the same excepting the mountain path to the Pachamama ceremonial ground was entirely transformed. Much steeper, ascending a towering peak. As we climbed in a group, scarlet dragons came pouring out of caves tucked into the stony cliff faces. The grey stone, winged lizard scales, my feet bare with skin on solid earth, echoed something archaic. The sense of proximity to the barebones planet—life and death, joy and suffering—felt ancient, sinewy, and strong. I awoke this morning somewhat groggy, tired from the rigor and intensity of travel. How we're surviving all of this is beyond me sometimes.

A word on the rigors of travel. Many seem to hold the misconception that travel of this nature is all fun and discovery. More often than not, the fun is eclipsed by the challenge of getting

from point A to point B. Sleepless nights in dingy hotel rooms are common fare. Many a traveler suffers from insomnia, unable to adjust to the constant changes in one's sleeping situation. Noise constantly lurks as a possibility in the background, and comes from the most surprising of sources: all-night music of the most awful sort, loudspeakers, and planes flying just overhead (oops, we're next to an airport). Hectic taxi-rides through hellish traffic, people almost constantly ogling the *gringos locos*, crazy gringos. In markets, one remains constantly on-guard for pickpockets and other unsavory characters. Lots of rest is prudent; I spend whole days in virtual isolation simply resting. Rest and hydration, both very important.

* * *

Some time during my first year at UCLA, we were fortunate enough to come across samples of the 2cb marketed by Drittwelle, out of South Africa, and available during the early '90s. My first dose—at 15mg—proved insufficient in manifesting any desirable effects. My second attempt proved much more successful, with a significantly higher dose reaching a whopping total of 85mg by the end of the night. The music was enriched to a peak of intensity approaching ecstatic, as I sank into a field of writhing and blissful hallucination reaching out and swaying like vines of ivy. Falling ever deeper into the euphoria, the ground fell out from beneath my feet in a swooping *whoosh* of neon vision. We had chosen a friend's house, his parents out of town for the weekend, for our evening sojourn. Looking from the upstairs into the living room below, the house was emptied, the windows blown out, and a thin layer of

sparkling snow covered every surface. My friends had magically disappeared and I was alone in this gothic cathedral of Apocalypse. Humanity had passed from the face of the planet, leaving only stillness and arboreal wind pouring through the house. It only lasted a couple minutes and I came to, my friends hovering above me with quizzical and concerned looks on their faces. 2cb was unique so far as the research chemicals were concerned, magical in itself aside from the research focus.

“You just went blank. Are you okay?” I was fine.

05/17/2009 Huancachina, Peru

I’ve been quite sick the last two days, waking up yesterday with a wicked case of diarrhea, promptly vomiting. I hardly got out of bed except to eat a few times. This seems to happen as we move from city to city, re-acclimating to the nascent bacteria at each stop. Last night—after a few hours of restful sleep—my uneasy bowels woke me, sending me to the traveler’s porcelain god for several hours of worship. I slept late this morning, and have been drinking a lot of water. Coca helps, though I have slowed down with it in general. Azalea is in town getting me the probiotic supplement they use around here—it actually works really well.

I fell into an anger loop last night regarding my brother and father; the first time in awhile. I find it somewhat discouraging.

05/25/2009 Arequipa, Peru

Two days ago we arrived in Arequipa. A grueling overnight bus through a barren landscape of dunes—the sun over the dunes soothed a mind exhausted from yet another sleepless night. Arequipa reminds me of Cusco in many ways, with colonial architecture and a high desert atmosphere. Overseen by immense and looming volcanic peaks, the central square is constructed almost entirely of white stone.

Yesterday we visited the museum at the University of Santa Maria, showcasing the ice

maiden “Juanita,” as well as relics discovered at her tomb site on the top of Mount Ampato. She was killed in a ritual ceremony of offering to the mountain, a “pure sacrifice.” I’m tiring of travel at this point, irritable and low energy.



Chivay-Arequipa

05/31/2009 Chivay, Peru

Faceless Nights by C.P. Gose

*Faceless nights,
sleepless at the head of the mother's tomb.*

*An endless string
of hotel rooms painted in patches;
colors of the aurora
and the sun's first rays.*

*The road,
beads and knotwork;
painted rainbows in regress
decorating infinity.*

*Hands worshipful,
joining man and the animal nature;
a world's wind blowing
in ceaseless desire.*

*Out through the turret,
and perching at the window:
a flurry of feathers and wings
gazes into vacant space.*

*We cover our faces
in religion and longing;
hidden places
for our solitude.*

*Turning corners,
unseen past the fading twilights;
and the great mountain,
touching starlit faces.*

*"I want to see you,"
he cries, heart pounding in sweaty chest.
But only blue and silent space
solemn in the sky.*

*The earth sighs.
Exhaling, she comes to pass:
the mountain, the sky,*

*the shining rise and fall
of the sun in her domed carriage.*

*While wheeling galaxies,
afame in filigrees of fire,
stop their turning,
the lights go out
and a new world dawns.*

When I was a child, my mother asked me, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” “A poet,” I responded—with innocence—as she laughed kindly. “You can be whatever you want,” she retorted, in typical—and maternal—form.

The first poem I ever wrote must have been around the age of nine. My fourth grade teacher had taken us on an overnight field trip to Mesa Verde in southern Colorado. I was quite an awkward young man, not terribly liked by most people my age. My friends seemed generally limited to one or two souls as idiosyncratic and alien as myself from myself. So we visited the ruins at Mesa Verde and somewhere along the road I made a joke and everyone laughed. One of those rare and peculiar experiences of belonging—mediated by laughter’s heresy—during a time of obscure identity.

So when we returned home, we were asked to write a poem. I still remember the first lines:

*I looked at Mesa Verde
the table that is green,
with many different sights
and many different scenes.*

Cute, simple, and warmly received by my teacher at the time, who had never been particularly impressed with any of my school work. The lilt of language always captured me, be it technical or poetic writing.

The valley here in Chivay reminds me of New Mexico—dry, sparse, and close to the sky, which grows more black than blue as you ascend. A preponderance of *Trichocereus Peruvianus* covers the hillsides, topped in crags of light and graying stone. Terraced farming graces a landscape surreal for its elevation and clarity. We walked the two miles down the valley to local hot springs, bathing briefly in a sun too direct for hot water. Returning shortly, we have been chewing coca; it helps greatly with the altitude we have reached at 3500 meters. I feel more



Gratefulbear and baby llama Michloe

comfortable here, chewing coca and relaxing.

The bottles of ayahuasca leaked on the bus ride from Arequipa, soaking my backpack all the way through, and filling the bus with an aroma both intoxicating and rich. Pulling the bottles out and laying them on the ground sans vigilance, they rattled about the floor of the bus, sliding down the rows and all throughout the cabin. I could only laugh at how ridiculous was this scene, with frenetic Hispanic music blaring in the background as—descending into the valley—we miraculously survived one hairpin turn after another, sending the bottles careening from corner to corner. The Medicine tossed about “every which way but loose,” as the saying goes, and dry Peruvian smirks greeted us as we gathered our bottles from the bus-aisle and disembarked at Chivay. Last night, we ate an excellent meal off the Plaza de Armas here at Chivay. The Argentinean wine—some of the best wine I have ever enjoyed—softly beckoned my mother back across the surging tide of that remembrance of an archaic world echoing in the waning moon.

Azalea is a wonderful person, full of a naïvete—though he may not yet know it—and best described as “romantic,” in the deep gothic sense of the word—the highest, and most spiritual, humanity there is. From his choice of diet, to his sense of the plant-world—just the kind of heart that carries a human being home—Azalea is almost crazier than I am. Almost, that is! The dude makes love to his cigarettes before smoking them—singing them sweet songs like Isaac Hayes, oooohyea—playing his flute at the most inopportune and annoying times. But more than just about anyone I have ever met, he tolerates me for who I am, a breath of fresh air in a crazy world!! Through all of the coca-insanity, sleepless nights, and agitation, he is quick to smile and faster to let go and move on. Though he tends to be the “man with the plan” when the time comes for critical decisions, Azalea is open to feedback and a member of the pack. The man can hold his Medicine, as much as even the most devout entheonaut. I have nothing but respect for Azalea; he is a “friend for life,” as the saying goes. Most of all, Gratefulbear really likes him:

*“You have friends for a reason,
friends for a season,
and friends for a lifetime.”*
—Romantic saying

I am infinitely grateful for his presence with us through these weeks and look forward to many years of friendship—with him and his family—to come. I would have him as a groomsman at my wedding, if he would have me. Friends like Azalea are always in mind—like family—and everything that is mine also belongs to him and his family.

The last time I saw my friend, the good doctor Dave, he was barely cogent in a fit of methoxylated ecstasy—close encounters of the tryptamine kind, I’ll take the fifth position thank you very much.

“I love you SOOO much,” he said in a wave of empathic heat, and perhaps he did truly love me—as he said—though I could not understand at the time.

Our friendship vanished on the wings of a raven, and I have not heard from him since. In all of my travels, ravens have always been the one perennial and uniform creature of the earth. From desert to mountain to forest, ravens and crows are kings of winged creatures the world over. But my dear friend Dave proved to be seasonal, passing with winter and the

one frigid, arboreal northern wind blowing from past to future, guiding our wandering souls onward like fate:

*“All that is gold does not glitter,
not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
deep roots are not reached by the frost.”*
—J. R. R. Tolkien

Dave was always a man who—in spite of his difficulties—lived from the vast and thunderous plains of the heart, wild and native, with all of its irrational vicissitudes—a true Buffalo Soldier watched over by earth’s own mother (who needs a personal mother when the earth is your *true* mother, right?). Together we sang “these songs of freedom—” and got *very* high—it was all we ever had as he smoked thick cigars in succession, and watched over my wounded heart under clear New Mexico skies. Dr. Dave was a true companion to my despair after the death of my mother. Living in the midst of that tragic world—so familiar to me—gilded by a man’s experience of a distant and cold personal mother, Dr. Dave made his way through medical school and fifteen years of practice on the strength of sheer heart, and then beyond to greener fields. A true genius of soul and mind, perhaps? One of those rare beings into whose very essence I have gazed, heart and soul, and seen that great and shimmering light which overflows with forgiveness and grace, found William Blake’s “sweet delight”:

*“Every night and every morn
some to misery are born.
Every morn and every night,
some are born to sweet delight.”*
—William Blake

I miss my dear friend, and suspect that one day I will see him again, whether in this world or the next. For true friendship is not quickly forgotten, and our souls are a true brotherhood to one another. “I love him SOOO much,” I say, and perhaps it’s as true as his words—methoxylated and tryptaminic—to me. For our lives are not 1s nor 0s nor disparate bits of electrical activity on some video screen, but an unfolding image of that very highest nature which I glimpsed in one and many: Dr. Dave’s face, my friend. Sometimes the image is unclear, but the day inevitably comes and we see Mona Lisa smiling, knowing.

“When you smile, hundreds of muscles relax in your face,” Thich Nhat Hahn says, another mantra and cliché for Oprah’s “Book of the Month Club.” But when I think about my friend Dave, my face relaxes, and I smile, for no particular reason other than he was a true friend and I love him. For no particular reason whatsoever other than the passing of a season, a friend, and that one world turning under a starlit sky: I LUUUUUUUUUUUUV YOU SOOOOOOOOOO MUCH!!!! Help me sing these songs of freedom . . .

*"From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
a light from the shadow's shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king"*

—J. R. R. Tolkien



Misti Mountain

06/02/2009 Cobanacondae, Peru

Last night we slept at Pinchollo, a small pueblo at 3600 meters. A forest of *Trichocereus Peruvianus* lines the road from Chivay, obelisks snaking our way past the valley into the Canyon de Colca. Though not so dramatic and sheer as the Grand Canyon, the Canyon de Colca descends graceful and slow to the Colca River a thousand meters below at its base, and from rim to base is some twice the depth of the Grand Canyon. Neatly tucked between two large and snow-peaked mountains, the barren and high desert reaching up into a dark and cloudless sky. We clearly felt the elevation last night, though not so bad as in Cuzco. I feel quite at home in this cold and dry climate which reminds me of the American Southwest. Pinchollo, nondescript excepting a lone hostel off the plaza; sleep likewise uneventful and dreamless as we caught a bus to Cobanacondae in the morning.

People laugh often in Cobanacondae. Women dressed ornate in their tradition, faces wrinkled in smile, fading at the edges. A weed-strewn landscape amidst a crown of snowy mountains in sphere about this modest canyon town. A bleary sun sets over stone and sand, bringing shadows all too cold for their desolation. We sit on stony seats. An old man hobbles by with his cane. Every town needs a rambling old man hobbling with his cane about the central plaza, and "full of the Spirit":

*"My house is for Christians, not drunks," he says. "La tierra es puro."
 "I'll drink to that," I think, smiling politely and ruminating heretically.
 "For there has never been a more wretched hive of scum and villainy."*

The very hierophant and shadow of a soul windswept into voidness. For my cup, though full, has always been a dirty one, chipped at the edges and swimming in sediments all too noxious. I have not showered in days, and the nights often pass sleepless, blinkless, gazing into the white and saltine brilliance of the waning moon.

"For we shall be the earth's own salt," I think again, groaning in self-deprecation.

Sinoidal, the midnight sky tides across the days that come and go without memory of their fading into mornings all too early for eyes so lidless. Brisk breezes blow subtle as the sun's final rays blaze needle-like over an infinitude of desert spaces escaping off mountains clinched in the snows that peak them.

06/16/2009 Cusco, Peru

I awoke early this morning, after sleep that—it seemed to me—never actually occurred, heart pained for Tom, my mother, brother, and family. So much loss, regret, so many mistakes. Feverish, I impulsively rushed out of our hostel room and down cobblestone steps framed on either side by tightly knit brickwork in the Incan style, the valley stretching out below in a dark orange *terra-cotta* ocean of syncretic Incan-colonial architecture and style. Brisk and rushing past the central Plaza de Armas and straight to the food market, buying bags full of fruit, nuts, and bread, then wandering onwards, turning dusty and solitary corners into the most impoverished corners of the city.

Roger of Wendover, in 1228, recounted the legend of the "Wandering Jew," a shoemaker who—on Christ's road to Calvary—struck Jesus when he stopped for a second to rest while carrying his cross, saying "Go on quicker, Jesus! Go on quicker! Why dost Thou loiter?" To which Jesus, "with a stern countenance," replied: "I shall stand and rest, but thou shalt go on till the last day."

Finding myself hopelessly lost, disoriented, and heartbroken—ever running on "till the last day"—I collapsed for a moment's rest on an old and cracked cornerstone where two roads crossed. Opening up the bags of fruit and food, the only thing I could think to do was hand out the fruits and foods to the passing *campesina*, valley peasants, carrying their heavy loads in colored wraps about their backs. Toothless smiles—weathered wrinkles reaching into heaven—eyes wreathed in earth's "meek inheritance":

*"Love lost, such a cost,
 give me things
 that don't get lost.
 Like a coin that won't get tossed
 rolling home to you."
 —Neil Young*

Such a mystery that inevitably one arrives at a crossroads—taking up the yoke (Matthew 11:29)—choosing a path, and thinking all the while we have made some sort of decision for

ourselves: mistakes we've made, friends we've lost, things we regret, people we love. But most of all, we think we have made the decision to return home, to take that path which returns us to a God we believe has abandoned us. How entirely mysterious that on this road, the only decision we have ever made is retrospective. That, according to Joseph Campbell's "monomyth" idea, we are called to God, receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit—then, returning home to family, friends, and one another, we can once and finally sigh—in good humor—with a joyous and lighthearted sense that one indeed, "took the road less traveled" (Robert Frost), regardless of the path taken. We're never separate from God, for all of life's pain and suffering. Not a single blade of grass is ever forgotten.

Laughing as the *campesina*-peasants smiled, patting my back and gesticulating in Spanish I only dimly understood, I looked down at my feet. "My God, what a fool I am"—for in my manic fervor I had forgotten to put shoes on, and was wearing only socks. I think we need a better word for this sort of thing than *irony*, or *humor*, or *foolishness*. I prefer to think of the rough, hard, and solid feeling of cobblestone on my tender feet as that by which:

*"On His clothes and His thigh He has a name written:
King of Kings and Lord of Lords."
—Revelation 19:16*

That this path, so full of pain, sorrow and loss yet: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

06/21/2009 Cusco, Peru

*"And as we wind on down the road
Our shadows taller than our soul
There walks a lady we all know
Who shines white light and wants to show
How everything still turns to gold.
And if you listen very hard
The tune will come to you at last
When all are one and one is all
To be a rock and not to roll."
—Jimmy Page/Robert Plant*

"I have something to tell you about your father," my mother said shortly before she died. "I always wanted you to be proud about where you came from, so never told you." And she never did.

*"The nature of things is in the habit
of concealing itself"
—Heraclitus, Fragment 54*

And my father always accused my intentions of being "veiled."

“Oh, aren’t you *so* dramatic,” with an aspirated rolling of his tempered blue eyes.

It was always my favorite color, blue. His eyes, like wings taken to flight with that longing for leaving but resigned to loving. The function button on my keyboard has died with the brightness setting on the monitor set to its lowest brightness. I suppose endings always come to one “in the dark.” My mother and brother spent many such days with the shades drawn in dreamless reverie. Each sentence tumbles up from the churning cauldron of stomach, dense with tissues neural and otherwise host to the oldest anaerobes on this planet, tinges of scarlet escaping into the vanishing archaic of unborn faces.

Our path escaped ahead of us—three still—up the narrowing valley again to Ollantaytambo. Stopping over at Písaq, the narrow market alleyways crushing in upon us from either and every inescapable direction. Our one night in Písaq, I caught a chest cold that accompanied me up the valley, there and back again. Part of me—including my body—appears to be well on its way home, though I am slow to follow. My mind returns to the thick and meandering nostalgia of Rilke’s *Book of Hours*, with its aura of tempered urgency. Kneeling at the feet of the dead, honeyed mummies.

Azalea brought up a most interesting point of crux regarding the gravity of places such as Peru, Cusco, and Ollantaytambo. Here the worlds crossed in irreconcilable fury come thundering down the mountain, cracking law’s chiseled stone with crushing wonder. Living in ours, a world bereft of wonder, we are sent out on the dark steeds of a terror that drives us to places too narrow for the treading of human feet. Our feet fall out from beneath us, harnessed by the windswept shadow of a thousand crashing hooves. In that darkness, earth’s first flower blooms. Without accord or reason, blooming and springing without eyes to see, ears to hear, nor even feet to tread the soft and warm cradle of those shimmering fields tipping the starlight petals.

Our last night in Písaq passed in a fever of lidless insomnia. Gratefulbear and I huddled in the weathered and running ink of discarded newspaper headlines, swept in hysterical fitfulness out the door into world’s abandonment. Bed sheets damp with the corporeal uncovering of that essential and blotting nakedness by which hell becomes the crossing of heavens: a life unlived to completion.

That next morning, we followed our weary feet down, and drawing deep of the well which, beckoning the high mountain waters of one of the many tributaries of the Urubamba River, thunders past into a chiseling absence. Reaching up into empty words, empty and hollow filial-hood spinning wild into an arching, tympanic canvas come crashing down over our calcified skulls in one blinding blow. Across the courtyard and gliding on feet as cracked as the mountain stones on which the empire of the Inca fell, here at Ollantaytambo, and escaping to places concealed in the high reaches of cloud and rain forest. Old Man, voice a tumbling of hooves in a Castilian pierced through with aspirations of Quechua.

In my solitude, down in that hole, I would dream of being a comfort to the grief-ridden heart. My father, in dreams, descending narrow, rock-strewn corridors to a flattening beach beneath arched bridgework hung over a moonlit river. Myself, body draped in a coat stretched overhead, fabric knit into a tightening spindle and wrapped around by a sash tied at the center. Father, coming from a high place and unwrapping the spindle, falling into my heart with restful tears. Standing tall within one another, fatherhood becoming forgiveness as the foregone conclusion of a blessed way.

Then flowing over into that opalescent fountain of childhood reveries, up the mountain

in our descent into one another. The last afternoon in Ollantaytambo, Gratefulbear and I ascended to the viewpoint parallel the ruins, those very same ruins that had moved us so deeply in the following journal entry:

2/11/2009 Ollantaytambo, Peru

A soft wind blows warmly up the crevasse perpendicular to the sacred valley where Ollantaytambo is situated. I think we will spend several days here. I'm quite moved by the people and the pace of life here. An even gentler wind blows through my soul this evening as we watch the sun set over this splendor of a valley. After our arrival by colectivo from Pisaq via Urubamba, we made our way through labyrinthine chasms of stone and soil, skipping over drainage rivulets from off the mountain stream of the Montana de Santa Marta.

Gazing up the crevasse eastwards up the valley of the Santa Marta, an immense calm suffused my body and oft-weary heart. There is a sense of sacred space here, perhaps in the heart of the people. Who was it that wrote 'the soul of a place is its people?' I feel myself being drawn up the valley, drifting in a world of folk-reveries and smiling faces, dark skinned and hiking up the valley with ease . . . to be here is to feel human again."

Exhausted, we again sat on the same crag stringing the arched hyperbolic skew of the bowing parallel, slipped off the mountainside. Standing tall on feet suspended touchless above the beckoning fingers of the earth's bittersweet caress. Then reaching out my hand, and taking mine into hers:

*"The mares which carry me as far as my spirit ever aspired
were escorting me, when they brought me and proceeded along the renowned road
of the goddess, which brings a knowing mortal to all cities one by one.
On this path I was being brought, on it wise mares were bringing me,
straining the chariot, and maidens were guiding the way.*

.

*Did the maidens guide the horses and the car on the broad way.
And the goddess received me gladly and took in her hand my right hand
And addressed to me the following words:
"O young man coming to our abode joined with immortal charioteers
With the horses which carry you,
welcome— since it was not an evil destiny that sent you forth to travel
this road (for indeed it is far from the beaten path of humans),
but Right and justice. There is need for you to learn all things—
both the unshaken heart of persuasive Truth
and the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true reliance.
But nevertheless you will learn these too—that the things that appear
must genuinely be, being always, indeed, all things."
—Parmenides, On Nature*

And looking about in a circle with wordless wonder, truly—now and forever—I saw into the face of the world around me, worn with suffering, and touching the earth—in this place—and knew I would never be once moved, though the stones should wither and the world pass away. Inevitably, though the arrow arches in a wild blindness—carried along—it cannot help but find rest in its return. Unmoved—we never visited the ruin at Ollantaytambo—I turned about and walked down the mountain. It was time to return home.

That afternoon, we returned up the valley to Cusco, again ascending the ridge up through Chinchero. Beauty struck me all around in sheltered intimations like a flickering candle cradled in the windy night. That night proceeded dreamless, a white and silken blanket of unwritten words across a weary canvas. The next morning I proceeded slowly—with a tempered and evolving urgency—once again to the San Pedro market.

Through the stampede of revelers celebrating the solstice and “rebirth of the sun,” the most holy of events in Incan cosmology, I took a moment’s rest at a bench. Carrying his box of work supplies and walking directly in my direction, a young boy—tapping my shoe—asked, “shoeshine, Meester?”—and this moment spilled into the future, alone in the hostel room. My vertigo/labyrinthitis—relics of my refusal to return from India—flaring through fontanelles and soft wisps of baby’s breath on my bald head. Looking about in a circle, the walls crashing in about me; body, space and time entirely alien and barren. Abandoned on this earthen wasteland, but a seed planted inside—a seed whose growth precludes a concealing, covered with a dark earth only ever rich for its lack of tending. A strange planet, a planet to which we do not belong. Our roots go much deeper. Yet sprouting, bringing sensory experience into full and conscious focus.

Pulling out several tins of colored powder, he took out a rag and wiped away a first and thinning layer of dust, beneath revealing a soft tone of skin. His hands black with polish and the aromatic vapor of turpentine escaping morning’s coil in splinters of sunlight across the fading grey stone of the market basin. My feet, bathed in the sweet touch of a childhood both profane and holy, stood at the mother’s head and looking down. Taking the tins of powder and nimbly lifting raised wisps of each color on the edge of his finger, then smearing in circles he closed the container and shaking it vigorously opened it back up.

“You like this color, Meester?”

With face upturned and eyes locked across moment’s passing. Baffled and laughing, sometimes I am the one standing still and conscious of the suffering at my feet. Yet still somehow the one suffering and at the feet of the Beloved.

“Except that you become as one of these,” colors mixed in a cheap tin, and I “saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.” (Revelation 21:1)

Consummatum Est (it is finished)

* * * * *

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*"I believe that the truth of the matter
is far more terrifying. That the real truth
that dare not speak itself is that
no one is in control. Absolutely no one"*

—Terence McKenna, "Dream Awake Lecture," 1994.

xxxi. What's Left of Prayer

The beast within roars his boneless frail.
From his roar a strong song, a cry to trees & moon.
Of his frail the nights crushed, the wet shame.
The lesson that any hour may lift.
The lesson that any hour may suddenly choke.
I sat here & nowhere, & I writhed.

xxxii. Angel-Leery

I met you twenty years ago today,
on a mountain path. You were dark-haired
& dark-eyed & smilingly curvaceously
pretty. You gamely threw & caught
a football with our group of hikers.
There was another too, but I chose you.

Our first dawn you slept on my couch,
I kissed you, & lay on the floor below.
You were a teacher in training, new
to the area, I think you liked me
well enough, I think it was better
than being a young woman alone.

Thanksgiving morning you talked of marriage
 & I didn't know then how close to it
 you'd already been. Such talk ended when
 your mother learned I was a grad school
 dropout, working at a coffee shop, &
 that my family genes were tainted.

By when you brought me to her mansion's
 door I should have known: I was no more
 bound to last in your life than a temporary
 teaching gig in a fallen factory town.
 The happy autumn became the sad winter
 became the despairing spring. It was over.

Strangely, something lingered. Hearts are not
 chess pieces, bodies remember words &
 touch, a clumsy laugh, the obsessed gestures
 of the forlorn & true. When you moved far
 I took planes to see you, share your meals
 again, drive around your next home.

The light we shared & made faded as
 months passed. Your yearn turned another
 way, other eyes, other hands. I moved on,
 too, because I was still young & the beast
 in me dragged me through the worst hours,
 would not let me off the humble way.

Twenty years ago: each of us lonely on
 a mountain path. I never climbed it again.

xxxiii. Octopus Tree at Cape Meares

This sitka has no central trunk. Branches
 root out in all directions, causing some
 to have likened it to a candleabra. Tis also said
 that the natives would bring their fallen chiefs
 in burial boats to this tree, the Council Tree,
 set the boat amongst its arms & let the
 wind & tides take them onward. Do men
 need the mystery or its explanation more?

xxxiv. Pink Noise

It was a pink noise I woke with &
 heard on the shore today. The piles of kelp
 drying, the furious tidal play. The sun consuming
 its final hour & pulling down all the lights
 with a gasp. A power that stirs, that drives,
 that lives as one & by millions. It was
 a pink noise that kept me into the dark.



xxxv. Ways of Waves

Some waves don't reach the shore, don't get
 even close. They rise, roil, roll out their stretch,
 then the rest takes them back. In their time of sun
 there is something each sees, feels, touch
 of wild air, sight of the others, near & far,
 that have pushed to surface & tossed into
 light. The ones who reach the shore carry the kelp,
 the driftwood, the soft & boneless creatures.
 Above there are gulls or herons in their ragged
 formation & raucous chatter. There's gift in
 this twist of a moment, of being something in
 this world, giving something to this world, &
 feeling its sure recall when the best has been spent.

xxxvi. Sometimes, Capitulation

What the night cried back,
 in all its colors & conflatons,
 its calliope of sensations & mysteries,
 was: flesh. chemistry. consciousness.
 The cage. The playing field.
 What tools made for these
 were tools made for an old war.
 Romance no longer in the song
 but by mastery of the singing.

xxxvii. And, Defiance

There is always that moment,
 that breath, when the flesh's hungers
 retreat a moment, chemistry slaves
 neither next option, when will floats,
 a nod, a shake, what led here,
 how the world looks right now,
 something in it, this, mine, what? I ask,
 & do not know. It will never get easier
 than tonight & this hour, make that move,
 use your bones, use your mind,
 use that breath in you like it invents
 the world new every single one.

xxxviii. What Left

My prayer of healing in song to you,
 from this far, between us the many hours,
 still-mysteries of lightless places & tongues
 unknown by men. My prayer of healing
 because I lose too if you fall, give in,
 & if you do not, my reward is nothing
 & everything, both.

xxxix. More Feedback

There was a movement in the shadow,
 a flash of pink, a breath, a quick word,
 maybe it was like the gesture that commenced
 to create the stars, maybe it was
 the men-herd feeding brutal & half-aware,
 but you & you & I alike make the choice
 what to heed, the masters to their duty,
 the slaves to their dance.

xl. Screen Burn

Again you arrive to my dreams,
 nearly twenty years since I last saw you,
 & yet here you are. I squirm &
 struggle for your heart, remember
 that night we seemed about to—
 We didn't, & the hours became years, &
 the world of my love for you sunk deeper within.
 But here you are again, still 17, still perfect,
 & you smile at me. Stricken anew, I nod, & I follow.

xli. Wage Slave

I would not work for you but these bars
 I did not build nor can pull down my own.
 I might work beside you if it could be said
 we make something, a good day's sweat
 from it. No. What I build for you is a higher
 pile of dead hours none will retrieve &
 the only difference I can see is that
 your dead hours pay for life's shiny things
 & mine pay for these angry lines of art.

xlii. Joy

The moment I knew I loved you was high
 & deep in a desert's night, when I saw
 the shift among worlds would take
 you & I by each other for a short
 time more & I must bid you jump
 or let you go. You jumped. My joy.

xliii. New Fixtion

The hunger that everything matters,
 however casual a hand touches a hand
 by night. Words without echo, without memory,
 yet this hour, how it wilds to possess
 the world! I wonder as it passes, its music
 become another & another. Wonder without
 why what this was, the avenue lights
 flaring, traffic's hard hustling drama, &
 the soft remove to dreams, if removed at all.

xliv. Nihil

If a fuck is all that's to it,
 feed, breed, continue the kind,
 if this is good, is it yet good enough?

xlvi. Crippled

One sits alone in a half-lit room,
 undone by the fleeing taste of sweet—
 The noise of the street sighs, abates—
 what's next? the spirit asks—
 What will you do? How to take that first,
 new step toward, past memory?

xlvi. I Dream of Guns

I dream of guns often, & wonder at this.
 Sometimes on an old car seat, sometimes
 in a policeman's hand. One time in an
 office, used by a security guard to keep
 me in sight, move me around. I suppose
 the gun, those seen & those felt all around,
 guards the hours, patrols the rich man's
 keep of golden coin & fine ass, lets the rest
 know that we tend the steering of
 a boat not our own, & that these controls
 existed when guns were yet sharpened rocks,
 & will exist on when men guard & direct
 other men by harnessing starlight itself.

xlvi. Sparkling Lights

No perfection, all perfection,
 the grime & glow of the hours,
 not a dream to solve, a music to salve,
 nothing but the world-crusted
 mind, its unsorted well of crying
 memories, the chance in every direction,
 the fleeing, luring chance, come along,
 it says, a guru, a demon, a bloom,
 a soft voice, come along before
 it passes. It passes. It passes.



xlvi. Self-Portrait

I climb inside my own mind &
 start to root around—
 I climb inside my own mind &
 here is what I found.

A beat-up orange football of foam.
 A headless plastic horse. A few wrinkled
Playboy magazines. A room, at least, of books.
 Countless thrift store notebooks with filled
 pages like this one. 1000 movie stubs. 1000 scatched LPs.
 The beat clothes of a tall man never pretty to himself.

I find the flowing image of a woman,
 continuous in every shadow, on every wall,
 a *want want want* radiating about her
 & the only question I have as a frame:
 do I want her heart or her cunt more?

There are children who never grow up in here,
 ever crippled, ever needful, & splotches
 all around them of crying guilt & hardened love
 & both of these are not mine but invaded
 me long ago & will not part me til I blow into the wind.

There are voices, just voices, preserved
 from long dead years. They mock my hair,
 my height, the shoes I wear, the very smell
 of my tired, confused, unkempt body as I grope
 among them in markets & classrooms.

And there are trees, millions of trees,
 & a moon above, & great of concert of stars,
 & there a mountain, & over there the sea,
 & sometimes all of this seems gone to me,
 like only men & their savage waking blood exists at all.

There are demons, too, & we regard each other,
 & I say *who? what?* & they say *you,*
& others, many others, every other, when will
you know? I say *I wish,* they say *let be,*
 we nod, we smile, there is chasm, there is hope.

And, last, my pen, this pen, many before
 it, many to come, & this page & this hour
 & I am inside my mind which looks like
 & not like this world. I breathe, relax.
 A beat, another. These words are my music,
 how I tell of life, & they shine in my mind,
 so all told here may stand revealed, &
 the room for so much more yet to come.

xlix. Vicious, Gone

A beast in me, a beast in you,
 a beast roars from the heart of this world,
 a beast roars out this world &
 each of us its cry, its horror at what
 its song looks like, this world, its song,
 the beast who cries out this world,
 lawless, because laws only name the chaos
 without knowing or owning it—
 lawless, because before then, before now,
 before order, before death—
 lawless, because the beast cries &
 is cry both, & I am crying too—

I am crying too for how much I will never know.

xl. Every Confession

You are all my brothers, every last
angel & bastard of you, & the trees
in unseen forests & the moonlight
on ocean waves a thousand miles
from land. All my brothers, those living
tonight, a thousand years ago, &
a thousand thousand years to come.

You are all my brothers not because
mystics & physics tell me so, not
because the dust I am once formed
many other things & will again
in what great hereon that I will know
otherwise, not even because my dust is yours.

You are all my brothers because this blood
in me is the sea & the sea covers
the world like a beautiful swathe
& there is stardust in my bones &
stars sing over the world like a first & last
lullaby & you are all my brothers because
even in my dreams you are there & what best hope
I have of hereafter is resting or dancing with you all.

li. God (.)

The woman smiled & moved like
 flesh made music on her bed,
 smiled as a few garments & then
 a fewer, the garments were clouds
 & she was the sky, so when they cleared,
 the sky now clear, her body smiling
 & nude, I said God. We invented you
 to explain ourselves to each other.
 She smiled & moved again & we invented
 & you explained but nothing, nothing explains.

lii. All One Flesh

The lean & lure toward one end
 & the other, a tan face in candlelight,
 a thin book that points to trees, but
 then all are one, a steely union
 in spirit & unto earth, somewhere
 down low & in between is the moving
 word, the laughing light, the doubtful dance
 best men of faith do in plain hours.

liii. What I Learned Today

A ragged man on the street passes me,
 & begs a sandwich. I ask why but
 nothing he says explains. I pass a woman
 & her friend considering *how much money*
next year? The light red to green &
 I have to get on, eventually to the
 tall building, the pisser full of men,
 I listen from a stall, one man has
 such a bad back, the other does too,
 & when at last all is still I remember
 listening to that leader of men
 saying his new war speech crushed him
 inside. A smiling girl in a short skirt,
 hot ass, dying heart. A broken bicycle
 frame, crushed to a tree. Rains all night.

liv. Train Through City December

Rains all night. The way is dis-illusion.
 I walk upright, herding my many musics
 & a sometimes sagging heart. I see faces
 struggle in the season of lights, what it is,
 what to do, how to shock themselves to happiness.



lv. mamapapa

In this crimson chamber,
 where heart beats memory, each breath a dream,
 I sit with you again, forlorn & true, &
 I ask, why did you make me?
 What love did you know?
 Where is this place?
 Will I come again to be?

lvi. The Healing

Inside the truth there is no preaching;
 there are still the doubts besetting all men;
 but wearing a stinging belt of hope,
 one begins to work.

But what if the truth is double, is many,
 & doubt shines more sexy, offers play
 when the work is too much, sings happy
 of moving from lazy faith to lazy faith?
 What if nothing holds too long in the primal
 shiftings of both world & soul?

Better ask: why the ceaseless dance of beat & breath?
 Why the key chased through layers of dreams?
 Why the healing in new touch, the mystery again close?

lvii. Sentience All

You come to me in voices, or maybe
 one great braided voice, a dropped pencil,
 a scrap of lettuce, the sheen on wet
 cobblestones, voices, braided voice, a cry
 I cannot know but to feel, an urging
 that I connect not just among men but
 among all. The need of the world from
 its cells to its peaks for attention, care,
 healing, & no cry of weakness, no bent
 despair in this, an instruction. Yes,
 take the yellowed groping of your heart,
 the shaped doubts you reck faith, yes,
 take the inky wants you call your songs
 but listen, near, crack the brambled
 world of men, its heights & cities of dirty
 mirrors, you come to me in voices
 or maybe one great braided voice, dolls
 in a junk heap, old terminals, fallen
 oak walls, another's long memory of a deep wound,
 & for a moment become plain & ferocious
 & say *when will you learn to arrive at this hour,*
& a thousand more like it, just to spark & begin?

lviii. Frenzied Faith

For the tall buildings feed me their despair,
 & the green things feed me their mystery,
 & my dreams feed me raw instructions,
 & flesh's want feeds my jerky dance,
 & I wonder how to make it all music,
 & I don't know how to remember, how to know I know.

lix. Psychedelic Dream (v)

In that dream or high or song
 I held my pen & looked at the page
 & nothing came: I sit very close,
 hunched into my pages, let the music
 in my ears swathe my mind,
 let the desert's long full moon beams,
 let the ocean's wild fecund hustle,
 let the woods replace my bones, tree up
 my body, let the sun break me into
 a thousand rays, let the love jingle
 my mind & the pain trouble my beat &
 breath, & I didn't stop & I haven't stopped
 & I will not stop because something listens, *something needs this*.

lx. Season of Lights

It wasn't years ago, like many of
 these stories, no. There was no full
 moon, as often is my light. I am not
 telling one more story of fine ass &
 tryptamines because I can, there are my
 hours, this is what I do with them.

There were pain, but it was not stuff
 of music, & I caused as much as
 I got. Was it reaction, was it revenge?
 What isn't in this world, one way
 or another? But there it was, not long
 ago enough to be long ago, merely ago.

I sat alone, with many others, &
 these were neither friends nor enemies,
 & I worked, & we worked, & nothing
 we made mattered, these hours weren't
 even pretty enough to be ugly. What, then,
 about this? Why remember it to this page?

It was because I looked up, suddenly,
 & nobody saw me do it. Looked up
 at something, was it an insect flashing
 by, tiny & up here on the 20th floor?
 It was, & nobody noticed but I did not
 look down, I watched it, this visible
 buzzing, watched it for how it did not
 belong here, & yet here it was.

Dissatisfied, thrown, now restless
 to know more, yet what book, or
 which teacher, what great human path
 of knowing would explain? None.
 I knew this. None would explain.
 That's how I ended up here. None explains.

And for a long time it hadn't mattered
 anymore. I had my work, alone &
 among many others. I had a chamber,
 a cupboard of food, a deck of cards,
 & a body to fuck every night. None
 explained but I no longer knew or cared.

Now I did, & I had to know, or at
 least I had to look again new &
 so I stood up & left my desk,
 my work, & climbed the 20 flights
 down to the street, a mid-morning
 of drizzle & hustlers with begging signs.

I walked the streets, thinking how
 do I unlearn all I no longer
 know? How do I do this? I'm
 telling you about something still fresh,
 not an old tale with all that came
 after. No. None explains. But I had to know.

And so here I sit before you, no cup,
 no line to peddle. I sit before you
 on this street corner, a shout's distance
 from that great tree of lights, &
 I do not know. None explains.
 But I ask you now, now, sit with me.

Sit here with me, a minute, an hour.
 We don't have to speak. Sit with me.
 We'll look at the lights. We'll watch the faces.
 We'll wonder high & low because that's what humans do.
 We don't have to speak but we may find we are singing.
 We'll feel the drizzle, the great miracle of doubt, & the love.

A handwritten signature, possibly 'D', followed by the date '12/17/2009'. The signature is written in a cursive, fluid style with a long horizontal stroke underneath.



Joseph Conrad

The Secret Sharer

(Classic Fiction)

I

On my right hand there were lines of fishing-stakes resembling a mysterious system of half-submerged bamboo fences, incomprehensible in its division of the domain of tropical fishes, and crazy of aspect as if abandoned forever by some nomad tribe of fishermen now gone to the other end of the ocean; for there was no sign of human habitation as far as the eye could reach. To the left a group of barren islets, suggesting ruins of stone walls, towers, and blockhouses, had its foundations set in a blue sea that itself looked solid, so still and stable did it lie below my feet; even the track of light from the westering sun shone smoothly, without that animated glitter which tells of an imperceptible ripple. And when I turned my head to take a parting glance at the tug which had just left us anchored outside the bar, I saw the straight line of the flat shore joined to the stable sea, edge to edge, with a perfect and unmarked closeness, in one leveled floor half brown, half blue under the enormous dome of the sky. Corresponding in their insignificance to the islets of the sea, two small clumps of trees, one on each side of the only fault in the impeccable joint, marked the mouth of the river Meinam we had just left on the first preparatory stage of our homeward journey; and, far back on the inland level, a larger and loftier mass, the grove surrounding the great Paknam pagoda, was the only thing on which the eye could rest from the vain task of exploring the monotonous sweep of the horizon. Here and there gleams as of a few scattered pieces of silver marked the windings of the great river; and on the nearest of them, just within the bar, the tug steaming right into the land became lost to my sight, hull and funnel and masts, as though the impassive earth had swallowed her up without an effort, without a tremor. My eye followed the light cloud of her smoke, now here, now there, above the plain, according to the devious curves of the stream, but always fainter and farther away, till I lost it at last behind the miter-shaped hill of the great pagoda. And then I was left alone with my ship, anchored at the head of the Gulf of Siam.

She floated at the starting-point of a long journey, very still in an immense stillness, the shadows of her spars flung far to the eastward by the setting sun. At that moment I was alone on her decks. There was not a sound in her—and around us nothing moved, nothing lived, not a canoe on the water, not a bird in the air, not a cloud in the sky. In this breathless pause at the threshold of a long passage we seemed to be measuring our fitness for a long and arduous enterprise, the appointed task of both our existences to be carried out, far from all human eyes, with only sky and sea for spectators and for judges.

There must have been some glare in the air to interfere with one's sight, because it was only just before the sun left us that my roaming eyes made out beyond the highest ridges of the principal islet of the group something which did away with the solemnity of perfect solitude. The tide of darkness flowed on swiftly; and with tropical suddenness a swarm of stars came

out above the shadowy earth, while I lingered yet, my hand resting lightly on my ship's rail as if on the shoulder of a trusted friend. But, with all that multitude of celestial bodies staring down at one, the comfort of quiet communion with her was gone for good. And there were also disturbing sounds by this time—voices, footsteps forward; the steward flitted along the main-deck, a busily ministering spirit; a hand-bell tinkled urgently under the poop-deck . . .

I found my two officers waiting for me near the supper table, in the lighted cuddy. We sat down at once, and as I helped the chief mate, I said:

“Are you aware that there is a ship anchored inside the islands? I saw her mastheads above the ridge as the sun went down.”

He raised sharply his simple face, overcharged by a terrible growth of whisker, and emitted his usual ejaculations: “Bless my soul, sir! You don't say so!”

My second mate was a round-cheeked, silent young man, grave beyond his years, I thought; but as our eyes happened to meet I detected a slight quiver on his lips. I looked down at once. It was not my part to encourage sneering on board my ship. It must be said, too, that I knew very little of my officers. In consequence of certain events of no particular significance, except to myself, I had been appointed to the command only a fortnight before. Neither did I know much of the hands forward. All these people had been together for eighteen months or so, and my position was that of the only stranger on board. I mention this because it has some bearing on what is to follow. But what I felt most was my being a stranger to the ship; and if all the truth must be told, I was somewhat of a stranger to myself. The youngest man on board (barring the second mate), and untried as yet by a position of the fullest responsibility, I was willing to take the adequacy of the others for granted. They had simply to be equal to their tasks; but I wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly.

Meantime the chief mate, with an almost visible effect of collaboration on the part of his round eyes and frightful whiskers, was trying to evolve a theory of the anchored ship. His dominant trait was to take all things into earnest consideration. He was of a painstaking turn of mind. As he used to say, he “liked to account to himself” for practically everything that came in his way, down to a miserable scorpion he had found in his cabin a week before. The why and the wherefore of that scorpion—how it got on board and came to select his room rather than the pantry (which was a dark place and more what a scorpion would be partial to), and how on earth it managed to drown itself in the inkwell of his writing-desk—had exercised him infinitely. The ship within the islands was much more easily accounted for; and just as we were about to rise from table he made his pronouncement. She was, he doubted not, a ship from home lately arrived. Probably she drew too much water to cross the bar except at the top of spring tides. Therefore she went into that natural harbor to wait for a few days in preference to remaining in an open roadstead.

“That's so,” confirmed the second mate, suddenly, in his slightly hoarse voice. “She draws over twenty feet. She's the Liverpool ship *Sephora* with a cargo of coal. Hundred and twenty-three days from Cardiff.”

We looked at him in surprise.

“The tugboat skipper told me when he came on board for your letters, sir,” explained the young man. “He expects to take her up the river the day after tomorrow.”

After thus overwhelming us with the extent of his information he slipped out of the

cabin. The mate observed regretfully that he “could not account for that young fellow’s whims.” What prevented him telling us all about it at once, he wanted to know.

I detained him as he was making a move. For the last two days the crew had had plenty of hard work, and the night before they had very little sleep. I felt painfully that I—a stranger—was doing something unusual when I directed him to let all hands turn in without setting an anchor watch. I proposed to keep on deck myself till one o’clock or thereabouts. I would get the second mate to relieve me at that hour.

“He will turn out the cook and the steward at four,” I concluded, “and then give you a call. Of course at the slightest sign of any sort of wind we’ll have the hands up and make a start at once.”

He concealed his astonishment. “Very well, sir.” Outside the cuddy he put his head in the second mate’s door to inform him of my unheard-of caprice to take a five hours’ anchor watch on myself. I heard the other raise his voice incredulously—“What? The Captain himself?” Then a few more murmurs, a door closed, then another. A few moments later I went on deck.

My strangeness, which had made me sleepless, had prompted that unconventional arrangement, as if I had expected in those solitary hours of the night to get on terms with the ship of which I knew nothing, manned by men of whom I knew very little more. Fast alongside a wharf, littered like any ship in port with a tangle of unrelated things, invaded by unrelated shore people, I had hardly seen her yet properly. Now, as she lay cleared for sea, the stretch of her main-deck seemed to me very fine under the stars. Very fine, very roomy for her size, and very inviting. I descended the poop and paced the waist, my mind picturing to myself the coming passage through the Malay Archipelago, down the Indian Ocean, and up the Atlantic. All its phases were familiar enough to me, every characteristic, all the alternatives which were likely to face me on the high seas—everything! . . . except the novel responsibility of command. But I took heart from the reasonable thought that the ship was like other ships, the men like other men, and that the sea was not likely to keep any special surprises expressly for my discomfort.

Arrived at that comforting conclusion, I bethought myself of a cigar and went below to get it. All was still down there. Everybody at the after end of the ship was sleeping profoundly. I came out again on the quarter-deck, agreeably at ease in my sleeping-suit on that warm breathless night, barefooted, a glowing cigar in my teeth, and, going forward, I was met by the profound silence of the fore end of the ship. Only as I passed the door of the forecabin, I heard a deep, quiet, trustful sigh of some sleeper inside. And suddenly I rejoiced in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in my choice of that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems, invested with an elementary moral beauty by the absolute straightforwardness of its appeal and by the singleness of its purpose.

The riding-light in the fore-rigging burned with a clear, untroubled, as if symbolic, flame, confident and bright in the mysterious shades of the night. Passing on my way aft along the other side of the ship, I observed that the rope side-ladder, put over, no doubt, for the master of the tug when he came to fetch away our letters, had not been hauled in as it should have been. I became annoyed at this, for exactitude in some small matters is the very soul of discipline. Then I reflected that I had myself peremptorily dismissed my officers from duty, and by my own act had prevented the anchor-watch being formally set and things properly attended to. I asked myself whether it was wise ever to interfere with the established routine of duties even from the kindest of motives. My action might have made me appear eccentric.

Goodness only knew how that absurdly whiskered mate would “account” for my conduct, and what the whole ship thought of that informality of their new captain. I was vexed with myself.

Not from compunction certainly, but, as it were mechanically, I proceeded to get the ladder in myself. Now a side-ladder of that sort is a light affair and comes in easily, yet my vigorous tug, which should have brought it flying on board, merely recoiled upon my body in a totally unexpected jerk. What the devil! . . . I was so astounded by the immovableness of that ladder that I remained stock-still, trying to account for it to myself like that imbecile mate of mine. In the end, of course, I put my head over the rail.

The side of the ship made an opaque belt of shadow on the darkling glassy shimmer of the sea. But I saw at once something elongated and pale floating very close to the ladder. Before I could form a guess a faint flash of phosphorescent light, which seemed to issue suddenly from the naked body of a man, flickered in the sleeping water with the elusive, silent play of summer lightning in a night sky. With a gasp I saw revealed to my stare a pair of feet, the long legs, a broad livid back immersed right up to the neck in a greenish cadaverous glow. One hand, awash, clutched the bottom rung of the ladder. He was complete but for the head. A headless corpse! The cigar dropped out of my gaping mouth with a tiny plop and a short hiss quite audible in the absolute stillness of all things under heaven. At that I suppose he raised up his face, a dimly pale oval in the shadow of the ship’s side. But even then I could only barely make out down there the shape of his black-haired head. However, it was enough for the horrid, frost-bound sensation which had gripped me about the chest to pass off. The moment of vain exclamations was past, too. I only climbed on the spare spar and leaned over the rail as far as I could, to bring my eyes nearer to that mystery floating alongside.

As he hung by the ladder, like a resting swimmer, the sea-lightning played about his limbs at every stir; and he appeared in it ghastly, silvery, fish-like. He remained as mute as a fish, too. He made no motion to get out of the water, either. It was inconceivable that he should not attempt to come on board, and strangely troubling to suspect that perhaps he did not want to. And my first words were prompted by just that troubled incertitude.

“What’s the matter?” I asked in my ordinary tone, speaking down to the face upturned exactly under mine.

“Cramp,” it answered, no louder. Then slightly anxious, “I say, no need to call anyone.”

“I was not going to,” I said.

“Are you alone on deck?”

“Yes.”

I had somehow the impression that he was on the point of letting go the ladder to swim away beyond my ken—mysterious as he came. But, for the moment, this being appearing as if he had risen from the bottom of the sea (it was certainly the nearest land to the ship) wanted only to know the time. I told him. And he, down there, tentatively:

“I suppose your captain’s turned in?”

“I am sure he isn’t,” I said.

He seemed to struggle with himself, for I heard something like the low, bitter murmur of doubt. “What’s the good?” His next words came out with a hesitating effort.

“Look here, my man. Could you call him out quietly?”

I thought the time had come to declare myself.

“I am the captain.”

I heard a “By Jove!” whispered at the level of the water. The phosphorescence flashed

in the swirl of the water all about his limbs, his other hand seized the ladder.

"My name's Leggatt."

The voice was calm and resolute. A good voice. The self-possession of that man had somehow induced a corresponding state in myself. It was very quietly that I remarked:

"You must be a good swimmer."

"Yes. I've been in the water practically since nine o'clock. The question for me now is whether I am to let go this ladder and go on swimming till I sink from exhaustion, or—to come on board here."

I felt this was no mere formula of desperate speech, but a real alternative in the view of a strong soul. I should have gathered from this that he was young; indeed, it is only the young who are ever confronted by such clear issues. But at the time it was pure intuition on my part. A mysterious communication was established already between us two—in the face of that silent, darkened tropical sea. I was young, too; young enough to make no comment. The man in the water began suddenly to climb up the ladder, and I hastened away from the rail to fetch some clothes.

Before entering the cabin I stood still, listening in the lobby at the foot of the stairs. A faint snore came through the closed door of the chief mate's room. The second mate's door was on the hook, but the darkness in there was absolutely soundless. He, too, was young and could sleep like a stone. Remained the steward, but he was not likely to wake up before he was called. I got a sleeping-suit out of my room and, coming back on deck, saw the naked man from the sea sitting on the main-hatch, glimmering white in the darkness, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. In a moment he had concealed his damp body in a sleeping suit of the same gray-stripe pattern as the one I was wearing and followed me like my double on the poop. Together we moved right aft, barefooted, silent.

"What is it?" I asked in a deadened voice, taking the lighted lamp out of the binnacle, and raising it to his face.

"An ugly business."

He had rather regular features; a good mouth; light eyes under somewhat heavy, dark eyebrows; a smooth, square forehead; no growth on his cheeks; a small, brown mustache, and a well-shaped, round chin. His expression was concentrated, meditative, under the inspecting light of the lamp I held up to his face; such as a man thinking hard in solitude might wear. My sleeping-suit was just right for his size. A well-knit young fellow of twenty-five at most. He caught his lower lip with the edge of white, even teeth.

"Yes," I said, replacing the lamp in the binnacle. The warm, heavy tropical night closed upon his head again.

"There's a ship over there," he murmured.

"Yes, I know. The Sephora. Did you know of us?"

"Hadn't the slightest idea. I am the mate of her—" He paused and corrected himself. "I should say I was."

"Aha! Something wrong?"

"Yes. Very wrong indeed. I've killed a man."

"What do you mean? Just now?"

"No, on the passage. Weeks ago. Thirty-nine south. When I say a man—"

"Fit of temper," I suggested, confidently.

The shadowy, dark head, like mine, seemed to nod imperceptibly above the ghostly

gray of my sleeping-suit. It was, in the night, as though I had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a somber and immense mirror.

"A pretty thing to have to own up to for a Conway boy," murmured my double, distinctly.

"You're a Conway boy?"

"I am," he said, as if startled. Then, slowly . . . "Perhaps you too—"

It was so; but being a couple of years older I had left before he joined. After a quick interchange of dates a silence fell; and I thought suddenly of my absurd mate with his terrific whiskers and the "Bless my soul—you don't say so" type of intellect. My double gave me an inkling of his thoughts by saying: "My father's a parson in Norfolk. Do you see me before a judge and jury on that charge? For myself I can't see the necessity. There are fellows that an angel from heaven—And I am not that. He was one of those creatures that are just simmering all the time with a silly sort of wickedness. Miserable devils that have no business to live at all. He wouldn't do his duty and wouldn't let anybody else do theirs. But what's the good of talking! You know well enough the sort of ill-conditioned snarling cur—"

He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes. And I knew well enough the pestiferous danger of such a character where there are no means of legal repression. And I knew well enough also that my double there was no homicidal ruffian. I did not think of asking him for details, and he told me the story roughly in brusque, disconnected sentences. I needed no more. I saw it all going on as though I were myself inside that other sleeping-suit.

"It happened while we were setting a reefed foresail, at dusk. Reefed foresail! You understand the sort of weather. The only sail we had left to keep the ship running; so you may guess what it had been like for days. Anxious sort of job, that. He gave me some of his cursed insolence at the sheet. I tell you I was overdone with this terrific weather that seemed to have no end to it. Terrific, I tell you—and a deep ship. I believe the fellow himself was half crazed with funk. It was no time for gentlemanly reproof, so I turned round and felled him like an ox. He up and at me. We closed just as an awful sea made for the ship. All hands saw it coming and took to the rigging, but I had him by the throat, and went on shaking him like a rat, the men above us yelling, 'Look out! look out!' Then a crash as if the sky had fallen on my head. They say that for over ten minutes hardly anything was to be seen of the ship—just the three masts and a bit of the forecastle head and of the poop all awash driving along in a smother of foam. It was a miracle that they found us, jammed together behind the forebits. It's clear that I meant business, because I was holding him by the throat still when they picked us up. He was black in the face. It was too much for them. It seems they rushed us aft together, gripped as we were, screaming 'Murder!' like a lot of lunatics, and broke into the cuddy. And the ship running for her life, touch and go all the time, any minute her last in a sea fit to turn your hair gray only a-looking at it. I understand that the skipper, too, started raving like the rest of them. The man had been deprived of sleep for more than a week, and to have this sprung on him at the height of a furious gale nearly drove him out of his mind. I wonder they didn't fling me overboard after getting the carcass of their precious ship-mate out of my fingers. They had rather a job to separate us, I've been told. A sufficiently fierce story to make an old judge and a respectable jury sit up a bit. The first thing I heard when I came to myself was the maddening howling of that endless gale, and on that the voice of the old man. He was hanging on to my bunk, staring into my face out of his sou'wester.

“Mr. Leggatt, you have killed a man. You can act no longer as chief mate of this ship.”

His care to subdue his voice made it sound monotonous. He rested a hand on the end of the skylight to steady himself with, and all that time did not stir a limb, so far as I could see. “Nice little tale for a quiet tea party,” he concluded in the same tone.

One of my hands, too, rested on the end of the skylight; neither did I stir a limb, so far as I knew. We stood less than a foot from each other. It occurred to me that if old “Bless my soul—you don’t say so” were to put his head up the companion and catch sight of us, he would think he was seeing double, or imagine himself come upon a scene of weird witchcraft; the strange captain having a quiet confabulation by the wheel with his own gray ghost. I became very much concerned to prevent anything of the sort. I heard the other’s soothing undertone.

“My father’s a parson in Norfolk,” it said. Evidently he had forgotten he had told me this important fact before. Truly a nice little tale.

“You had better slip down into my stateroom now,” I said, moving off stealthily. My double followed my movements; our bare feet made no sound; I let him in, closed the door with care, and, after giving a call to the second mate, returned on deck for my relief.

“Not much sign of any wind yet,” I remarked when he approached.

“No, sir. Not much,” he assented, sleepily, in his hoarse voice, with just enough deference, no more, and barely suppressing a yawn.

“Well, that’s all you have to look out for. You have got your orders.”

“Yes, sir.”

I paced a turn or two on the poop and saw him take up his position face forward with his elbow in the ratlines of the mizzen-rigging before I went below. The mate’s faint snoring was still going on peacefully. The cuddy lamp was burning over the table on which stood a vase with flowers, a polite attention from the ship’s provision merchant—the last flowers we should see for the next three months at the very least. Two bunches of bananas hung from the beam symmetrically, one on each side of the rudder-casing. Everything was as before in the ship—except that two of her captain’s sleeping-suits were simultaneously in use, one motionless in the cuddy, the other keeping very still in the captain’s stateroom.

It must be explained here that my cabin had the form of the capital letter L, the door being within the angle and opening into the short part of the letter. A couch was to the left, the bed place to the right; my writing-desk and the chronometers’ table faced the door. But anyone opening it, unless he stepped right inside, had no view of what I call the long (or vertical) part of the letter. It contained some lockers surmounted by a bookcase; and a few clothes, a thick jacket or two, caps, oilskin coat, and such like, hung on hooks. There was at the bottom of that part a door opening into my bathroom, which could be entered also directly from the saloon. But that way was never used.

The mysterious arrival had discovered the advantage of this particular shape. Entering my room, lighted strongly by a big bulkhead lamp swung on gimbals above my writing desk, I did not see him anywhere till he stepped out quietly from behind the coats hung in the recessed part.

“I heard somebody moving about, and went in there at once,” he whispered.

I, too, spoke under my breath.

“Nobody is likely to come in here without knocking and getting permission.”

He nodded. His face was thin and the sunburn faded, as though he had been ill. And no wonder. He had been, I heard presently, kept under arrest in his cabin for nearly seven

weeks. But there was nothing sickly in his eyes or in his expression. He was not a bit like me, really; yet, as we stood leaning over my bed-place, whispering side by side, with our dark heads together and our backs to the door, anybody bold enough to open it stealthily would have been treated to the uncanny sight of a double captain busy talking in whispers with his other self.

"But all this doesn't tell me how you came to hang on to our side-ladder," I inquired, in the hardly audible murmurs we used, after he had told me something more of the proceedings on board the *Sephora* once the bad weather was over.

"When we sighted Java Head I had had time to think all those matters out several times over. I had six weeks of doing nothing else, and with only an hour or so every evening for a tramp on the quarter-deck."

He whispered, his arms folded on the side of my bed place, staring through the open port. And I could imagine perfectly the manner of this thinking out—a stubborn if not a steadfast operation; something of which I should have been perfectly incapable.

"I reckoned it would be dark before we closed with the land," he continued, so low that I had to strain my hearing near as we were to each other, shoulder touching shoulder almost. "So I asked to speak to the old man. He always seemed very sick when he came to see me—as if he could not look me in the face. You know, that foresail saved the ship. She was too deep to have run long under bare poles. And it was I that managed to set it for him. Anyway, he came. When I had him in my cabin—he stood by the door looking at me as if I had the halter round my neck already—I asked him right away to leave my cabin door unlocked at night while the ship was going through Sunda Straits. There would be the Java coast within two or three miles, off Angier Point. I wanted nothing more. I've had a prize for swimming my second year in the Conway."

"I can believe it," I breathed out.

"God only knows why they locked me in every night. To see some of their faces you'd have thought they were afraid I'd go about at night strangling people. Am I a murdering brute? Do I look it? By Jove! if I had been he wouldn't have trusted himself like that into my room. You'll say I might have chucked him aside and bolted out, there and then—it was dark already. Well, no. And for the same reason I wouldn't think of trying to smash the door. There would have been a rush to stop me at the noise, and I did not mean to get into a confounded scrimmage. Somebody else might have got killed—for I would not have broken out only to get chucked back, and I did not want any more of that work. He refused, looking more sick than ever. He was afraid of the men, and also of that old second mate of his who had been sailing with him for years—a gray-headed old humbug; and his steward, too, had been with him devil knows how long—seventeen years or more—a dogmatic sort of loafer who hated me like poison, just because I was the chief mate. No chief mate ever made more than one voyage in the *Sephora*, you know. Those two old chaps ran the ship. Devil only knows what the skipper wasn't afraid of (all his nerve went to pieces altogether in that hellish spell of bad weather we had)—of what the law would do to him—of his wife, perhaps. Oh, yes! she's on board. Though I don't think she would have meddled. She would have been only too glad to have me out of the ship in any way. The 'brand of Cain' business, don't you see. That's all right. I was ready enough to go off wandering on the face of the earth—and that was price enough to pay for an Abel of that sort. Anyhow, he wouldn't listen to me. 'This thing must take its course. I represent the law here.' He was shaking like a leaf. 'So you won't?' 'No!' 'Then I hope you will be able to sleep on that,' I said, and turned my back on him. 'I wonder that you can,' cries he,

and locks the door.

“Well after that, I couldn’t. Not very well. That was three weeks ago. We have had a slow passage through the Java Sea; drifted about Carimata for ten days. When we anchored here they thought, I suppose, it was all right. The nearest land (and that’s five miles) is the ship’s destination; the consul would soon set about catching me; and there would have been no object in holding to these islets there. I don’t suppose there’s a drop of water on them. I don’t know how it was, but to-night that steward, after bringing me my supper, went out to let me eat it, and left the door unlocked. And I ate it—all there was, too. After I had finished I strolled out on the quarter-deck. I don’t know that I meant to do anything. A breath of fresh air was all I wanted, I believe. Then a sudden temptation came over me. I kicked off my slippers and was in the water before I had made up my mind fairly. Somebody heard the splash and they raised an awful hullabaloo. ‘He’s gone! Lower the boats! He’s committed suicide! No, he’s swimming.’ Certainly I was swimming. It’s not so easy for a swimmer like me to commit suicide by drowning. I landed on the nearest islet before the boat left the ship’s side. I heard them pulling about in the dark, hailing, and so on, but after a bit they gave up. Everything quieted down and the anchorage became still as death. I sat down on a stone and began to think. I felt certain they would start searching for me at daylight. There was no place to hide on those stony things—and if there had been, what would have been the good? But now I was clear of that ship, I was not going back. So after a while I took off all my clothes, tied them up in a bundle with a stone inside, and dropped them in the deep water on the outer side of that islet. That was suicide enough for me. Let them think what they liked, but I didn’t mean to drown myself. I meant to swim till I sank—but that’s not the same thing. I struck out for another of these little islands, and it was from that one that I first saw your riding-light. Something to swim for. I went on easily, and on the way I came upon a flat rock a foot or two above water. In the daytime, I dare say, you might make it out with a glass from your poop. I scrambled up on it and rested myself for a bit. Then I made another start. That last spell must have been over a mile.”

His whisper was getting fainter and fainter, and all the time he stared straight out through the port-hole, in which there was not even a star to be seen. I had not interrupted him. There was something that made comment impossible in his narrative, or perhaps in himself; a sort of feeling, a quality, which I can’t find a name for. And when he ceased, all I found was a futile whisper: “So you swam for our light?”

“Yes—straight for it. It was something to swim for. I couldn’t see any stars low down because the coast was in the way, and I couldn’t see the land, either. The water was like glass. One might have been swimming in a confounded thousand-feet deep cistern with no place for scrambling out anywhere; but what I didn’t like was the notion of swimming round and round like a crazed bullock before I gave out; and as I didn’t mean to go back . . . No. Do you see me being hauled back, stark naked, off one of these little islands by the scruff of the neck and fighting like a wild beast? Somebody would have got killed for certain, and I did not want any of that. So I went on. Then your ladder—”

“Why didn’t you hail the ship?” I asked, a little louder.

He touched my shoulder lightly. Lazy footsteps came right over our heads and stopped. The second mate had crossed from the other side of the poop and might have been hanging over the rail for all we knew.

“He couldn’t hear us talking—could he?” My double breathed into my very ear,

anxiously.

His anxiety was in answer, a sufficient answer, to the question I had put to him. An answer containing all the difficulty of that situation. I closed the porthole quietly, to make sure. A louder word might have been overheard.

“Who’s that?” he whispered then.

“My second mate. But I don’t know much more of the fellow than you do.”

And I told him a little about myself. I had been appointed to take charge while I least expected anything of the sort, not quite a fortnight ago. I didn’t know either the ship or the people. Hadn’t had the time in port to look about me or size anybody up. And as to the crew, all they knew was that I was appointed to take the ship home. For the rest, I was almost as much of a stranger on board as himself, I said. And at the moment I felt it most acutely. I felt that it would take very little to make me a suspect person in the eyes of the ship’s company.

He had turned about meantime; and we, the two strangers in the ship, faced each other in identical attitudes.

“Your ladder—” he murmured, after a silence. “Who’d have thought of finding a ladder hanging over at night in a ship anchored out here! I felt just then a very unpleasant faintness. After the life I’ve been leading for nine weeks, anybody would have got out of condition. I wasn’t capable of swimming round as far as your rudder chains. And, lo and behold! there was a ladder to get hold of. After I gripped it I said to myself, ‘What’s the good?’ When I saw a man’s head looking over I thought I would swim away presently and leave him shouting—in whatever language it was. I didn’t mind being looked at. I—I liked it. And then you speaking to me so quietly—as if you had expected me—made me hold on a little longer. It had been a confounded lonely time—I don’t mean while swimming. I was glad to talk a little to somebody that didn’t belong to the *Sephora*. As to asking for the captain, that was a mere impulse. It could have been no use, with all the ship knowing about me and the other people pretty certain to be round here in the morning. I don’t know—I wanted to be seen, to talk with somebody, before I went on. I don’t know what I would have said . . . ‘Fine night, isn’t it?’ or something of the sort.”

“Do you think they will be round here presently?” I asked with some incredulity.

“Quite likely,” he said, faintly.

He looked extremely haggard all of a sudden. His head rolled on his shoulders.

“H’m. We shall see then. Meantime get into that bed,” I whispered. “Want help? There.”

It was a rather high-bed place with a set of drawers underneath. This amazing swimmer really needed the lift I gave him by seizing his leg. He tumbled in, rolled over on his back, and flung one arm across his eyes. And then, with his face nearly hidden, he must have looked exactly as I used to look in that bed. I gazed upon my other self for a while before drawing across carefully the two green serge curtains which ran on a brass rod. I thought for a moment of pinning them together for greater safety, but I sat down on the couch, and once there I felt unwilling to rise and hunt for a pin. I would do it in a moment. I was extremely tired, in a peculiarly intimate way, by the strain of stealthiness, by the effort of whispering and the general secrecy of this excitement. It was three o’clock by now and I had been on my feet since nine, but I was not sleepy; I could not have gone to sleep. I sat there, fagged out, looking at the curtains, trying to clear my mind of the confused sensation of being in two places at once, and greatly bothered by an exasperating knocking in my head. It was a relief to discover suddenly

that it was not in my head at all, but on the outside of the door. Before I could collect myself the words "Come in" were out of my mouth, and the steward entered with a tray, bringing in my morning coffee. I had slept, after all, and I was so frightened that I shouted, "This way! I am here, steward," as though he had been miles away. He put down the tray on the table next the couch and only then said, very quietly, "I can see you are here, sir." I felt him give me a keen look, but I dared not meet his eyes just then. He must have wondered why I had drawn the curtains of my bed before going to sleep on the couch. He went out, hooking the door open as usual.

I heard the crew washing decks above me. I knew I would have been told at once if there had been any wind. Calm, I thought, and I was doubly vexed. Indeed, I felt dual more than ever. The steward reappeared suddenly in the doorway. I jumped up from the couch so quickly that he gave a start.

"What do you want here?"

"Close your port, sir—they are washing decks."

"It is closed," I said, reddening.

"Very well, sir." But he did not move from the doorway and returned my stare in an extraordinary, equivocal manner for a time. Then his eyes wavered, all his expression changed, and in a voice unusually gentle, almost coaxingly:

"May I come in to take the empty cup away, sir?"

"Of course!" I turned my back on him while he popped in and out. Then I unhooked and closed the door and even pushed the bolt. This sort of thing could not go on very long. The cabin was as hot as an oven, too. I took a peep at my double, and discovered that he had not moved, his arm was still over his eyes; but his chest heaved; his hair was wet; his chin glistened with perspiration. I reached over him and opened the port.

"I must show myself on deck," I reflected.

Of course, theoretically, I could do what I liked, with no one to say nay to me within the whole circle of the horizon; but to lock my cabin door and take the key away I did not dare. Directly I put my head out of the companion I saw the group of my two officers, the second mate barefooted, the chief mate in long india rubber boots, near the break of the poop, and the steward half-way down the poop-ladder talking to them eagerly. He happened to catch sight of me and dived, the second ran down on the main-deck shouting some order or other, and the chief mate came to meet me, touching his cap.

There was a sort of curiosity in his eye that I did not like. I don't know whether the steward had told them that I was "queer" only, or downright drunk, but I know the man meant to have a good look at me. I watched him coming with a smile which, as he got into point-blank range, took effect and froze his very whiskers. I did not give him time to open his lips.

"Square the yards by lifts and braces before the hands go to breakfast."

It was the first particular order I had given on board that ship; and I stayed on deck to see it executed, too. I had felt the need of asserting myself without loss of time. That sneering young cub got taken down a peg or two on that occasion, and I also seized the opportunity of having a good look at the face of every foremast man as they filed past me to go to the after braces. At breakfast time, eating nothing myself, I presided with such frigid dignity that the two mates were only too glad to escape from the cabin as soon as decency permitted; and all the time the dual working of my mind distracted me almost to the point of insanity. I was

constantly watching myself, my secret self, as dependent on my actions as my own personality, sleeping in that bed, behind that door which faced me as I sat at the head of the table. It was very much like being mad, only it was worse because one was aware of it.

I had to shake him for a solid minute, but when at last he opened his eyes it was in the full possession of his senses, with an inquiring look.

"All's well so far," I whispered. "Now you must vanish into the bath-room."

He did so, as noiseless as a ghost, and then I rang for the steward, and facing him boldly, directed him to tidy up my stateroom while I was having my bath—"and be quick about it." As my tone admitted of no excuses, he said, "Yes, sir," and ran off to fetch his dustpan and brushes. I took a bath and did most of my dressing, splashing, and whistling softly for the steward's edification, while the secret sharer of my life stood drawn up bolt upright in that little space, his face looking very sunken in daylight, his eyelids lowered under the stern, dark line of his eyebrows drawn together by a slight frown.

When I left him there to go back to my room the steward was finishing dusting. I sent for the mate and engaged him in some insignificant conversation. It was, as it were, trifling with the terrific character of his whiskers; but my object was to give him an opportunity for a good look at my cabin. And then I could at last shut, with a clear conscience, the door of my stateroom and get my double back into the recessed part. There was nothing else for it. He had to sit still on a small folding stool, half smothered by the heavy coats hanging there. We listened to the steward going into the bath-room out of the saloon, filling the water-bottles there, scrubbing the bath, setting things to rights, whisk, bang, clatter—out again into the saloon—turn the key—click. Such was my scheme for keeping my second self invisible. Nothing better could be contrived under the circumstances. And there we sat; I at my writing-desk ready to appear busy with some papers, he behind me out of sight of the door. It would not have been prudent to talk in daytime; and I could not have stood the excitement of that queer sense of whispering to myself. Now and then, glancing over my shoulder, I saw him far back there, sitting rigidly on the low stool, his bare feet close together, his arms folded, his head hanging on his breast—and perfectly still. Anybody would have taken him for me.

I was fascinated by it myself. Every moment I had to glance over my shoulder. I was looking at him when a voice outside the door said:

"Beg pardon, sir."

"Well! . . ." I kept my eyes on him, and so when the voice outside the door announced, "There's a ship's boat coming our way, sir," I saw him give a start—the first movement he had made for hours. But he did not raise his bowed head.

"All right. Get the ladder over."

I hesitated. Should I whisper something to him? But what? His immobility seemed to have been never disturbed. What could I tell him he did not know already? . . . Finally I went on deck.

II

The skipper of the *Sephora* had a thin red whisker all round his face, and the sort of complexion that goes with hair of that color; also the particular, rather smeary shade of blue in the eyes. He was not exactly a showy figure; his shoulders were high, his stature but middling—one leg slightly more bandy than the other. He shook hands, looking vaguely

around. A spiritless tenacity was his main characteristic, I judged. I behaved with a politeness which seemed to disconcert him. Perhaps he was shy. He mumbled to me as if he were ashamed of what he was saying; gave his name (it was something like Archbold—but at this distance of years I hardly am sure), his ship's name, and a few other particulars of that sort, in the manner of a criminal making a reluctant and doleful confession. He had had terrible weather on the passage out—terrible—terrible—wife aboard, too.

By this time we were seated in the cabin and the steward brought in a tray with a bottle and glasses. "Thanks! No." Never took liquor. Would have some water, though. He drank two tumblerfuls. Terrible thirsty work. Ever since daylight had been exploring the islands round his ship.

"What was that for—fun?" I asked, with an appearance of polite interest.

"No!" He sighed. "Painful duty."

As he persisted in his mumbling and I wanted my double to hear every word, I hit upon the notion of informing him that I regretted to say I was hard of hearing.

"Such a young man, too!" he nodded, keeping his smeary blue, unintelligent eyes fastened upon me. "What was the cause of it—some disease?" he inquired, without the least sympathy and as if he thought that, if so, I'd got no more than I deserved.

"Yes; disease," I admitted in a cheerful tone which seemed to shock him. But my point was gained, because he had to raise his voice to give me his tale. It is not worth while to record his version. It was just over two months since all this had happened, and he had thought so much about it that he seemed completely muddled as to its bearings, but still immensely impressed.

"What would you think of such a thing happening on board your own ship? I've had the *Sephora* for these fifteen years. I am a well-known shipmaster."

He was densely distressed—and perhaps I should have sympathized with him if I had been able to detach my mental vision from the unsuspected sharer of my cabin as though he were my second self. There he was on the other side of the bulkhead, four or five feet from us, no more, as we sat in the saloon. I looked politely at Captain Archbold (if that was his name), but it was the other I saw, in a gray sleeping suit, seated on a low stool, his bare feet close together, his arms folded, and every word said between us falling into the ears of his dark head bowed on his chest.

"I have been at sea now, man and boy, for seven-and-thirty years, and I've never heard of such a thing happening in an English ship. And that it should be my ship. Wife on board, too."

I was hardly listening to him.

"Don't you think," I said, "that the heavy sea which, you told me, came aboard just then might have killed the man? I have seen the sheer weight of a sea kill a man very neatly, by simply breaking his neck."

"Good God!" he uttered, impressively, fixing his smeary blue eyes on me. "The sea! No man killed by the sea ever looked like that." He seemed positively scandalized at my suggestion. And as I gazed at him certainly not prepared for anything original on his part, he advanced his head close to mine and thrust his tongue out at me so suddenly that I couldn't help starting back.

After scoring over my calmness in this graphic way he nodded wisely. If I had seen the sight, he assured me, I would never forget it as long as I lived. The weather was too bad to give

the corpse a proper sea burial. So next day at dawn they took it up on the poop, covering its face with a bit of bunting; he read a short prayer, and then, just as it was, in its oilskins and long boots, they launched it amongst those mountainous seas that seemed ready every moment to swallow up the ship herself and the terrified lives on board of her.

"That reefed foresail saved you," I threw in.

"Under God—it did," he exclaimed fervently. "It was by a special mercy, I firmly believe, that it stood some of those hurricane squalls."

"It was the setting of that sail which—" I began.

"God's own hand in it," he interrupted me. "Nothing less could have done it. I don't mind telling you that I hardly dared give the order. It seemed impossible that we could touch anything without losing it, and then our last hope would have been gone."

The terror of that gale was on him yet. I let him go on for a bit, then said, casually—as if returning to a minor subject:

"You were very anxious to give up your mate to the shore people, I believe?"

He was. To the law. His obscure tenacity on that point had in it something incomprehensible and a little awful; something, as it were, mystical, quite apart from his anxiety that he should not be suspected of "countenancing any doings of that sort." Seven-and-thirty virtuous years at sea, of which over twenty of immaculate command, and the last fifteen in the *Sephora*, seemed to have laid him under some pitiless obligation.

"And you know," he went on, groping shame-facedly amongst his feelings, "I did not engage that young fellow. His people had some interest with my owners. I was in a way forced to take him on. He looked very smart, very gentlemanly, and all that. But do you know—I never liked him, somehow. I am a plain man. You see, he wasn't exactly the sort for the chief mate of a ship like the *Sephora*."

I had become so connected in thoughts and impressions with the secret sharer of my cabin that I felt as if I, personally, were being given to understand that I, too, was not the sort that would have done for the chief mate of a ship like the *Sephora*. I had no doubt of it in my mind.

"Not at all the style of man. You understand," he insisted, superfluously, looking hard at me.

I smiled urbanely. He seemed at a loss for a while.

"I suppose I must report a suicide."

"Beg pardon?"

"Suicide! That's what I'll have to write to my owners directly I get in."

"Unless you manage to recover him before tomorrow," I assented, dispassionately. . .
"I mean, alive."

He mumbled something which I really did not catch, and I turned my ear to him in a puzzled manner. He fairly bawled:

"The land—I say, the mainland is at least seven miles off my anchorage."

"About that."

My lack of excitement, of curiosity, of surprise, of any sort of pronounced interest, began to arouse his distrust. But except for the felicitous pretense of deafness I had not tried to pretend anything. I had felt utterly incapable of playing the part of ignorance properly, and therefore was afraid to try. It is also certain that he had brought some ready-made suspicions with him, and that he viewed my politeness as a strange and unnatural phenomenon. And

yet how else could I have received him? Not heartily! That was impossible for psychological reasons, which I need not state here. My only object was to keep off his inquiries. Surlily? Yes, but surliness might have provoked a point-blank question. From its novelty to him and from its nature, punctilious courtesy was the manner best calculated to restrain the man. But there was the danger of his breaking through my defense bluntly. I could not, I think, have met him by a direct lie, also for psychological (not moral) reasons. If he had only known how afraid I was of his putting my feeling of identity with the other to the test! But, strangely enough—(I thought of it only afterwards)—I believe that he was not a little disconcerted by the reverse side of that weird situation, by something in me that reminded him of the man he was seeking—suggested a mysterious similitude to the young fellow he had distrusted and disliked from the first.

However that might have been, the silence was not very prolonged. He took another oblique step.

“I reckon I had no more than a two-mile pull to your ship. Not a bit more.”

“And quite enough, too, in this awful heat,” I said.

Another pause full of mistrust followed. Necessity, they say, is mother of invention, but fear, too, is not barren of ingenious suggestions. And I was afraid he would ask me point-blank for news of my other self.

“Nice little saloon, isn’t it?” I remarked, as if noticing for the first time the way his eyes roamed from one closed door to the other. “And very well fitted out, too. Here, for instance,” I continued, reaching over the back of my seat negligently and flinging the door open, “is my bathroom.”

He made an eager movement, but hardly gave it a glance. I got up, shut the door of the bathroom, and invited him to have a look round, as if I were very proud of my accommodation. He had to rise and be shown round, but he went through the business without any raptures whatever.

“And now we’ll have a look at my stateroom,” I declared, in a voice as loud as I dared to make it, crossing the cabin to the starboard side with purposely heavy steps.

He followed me in and gazed around. My intelligent double had vanished. I played my part.

“Very convenient—isn’t it?”

“Very nice. Very comf . . .” He didn’t finish and went out brusquely as if to escape from some unrighteous wiles of mine. But it was not to be. I had been too frightened not to feel vengeful; I felt I had him on the run, and I meant to keep him on the run. My polite insistence must have had something menacing in it, because he gave in suddenly. And I did not let him off a single item; mate’s room, pantry, storerooms, the very sail locker which was also under the poop—he had to look into them all. When at last I showed him out on the quarter-deck he drew a long, spiritless sigh, and mumbled dismally that he must really be going back to his ship now. I desired my mate, who had joined us, to see to the captain’s boat.

The man of whiskers gave a blast on the whistle which he used to wear hanging round his neck, and yelled, “Sephora’s away!” My double down there in my cabin must have heard, and certainly could not feel more relieved than I. Four fellows came running out from somewhere forward and went over the side, while my own men, appearing on deck too, lined the rail. I escorted my visitor to the gangway ceremoniously, and nearly overdid it. He was a tenacious beast. On the very ladder he lingered, and in that unique, guiltily conscientious

manner of sticking to the point:

"I say . . . you . . . you don't think that—"

I covered his voice loudly:

"Certainly not. . . . I am delighted. Good-by."

I had an idea of what he meant to say, and just saved myself by the privilege of defective hearing. He was too shaken generally to insist, but my mate, close witness of that parting, looked mystified and his face took on a thoughtful cast. As I did not want to appear as if I wished to avoid all communication with my officers, he had the opportunity to address me.

"Seems a very nice man. His boat's crew told our chaps a very extraordinary story, if what I am told by the steward is true. I suppose you had it from the captain, sir?"

"Yes. I had a story from the captain."

"A very horrible affair—isn't it, sir?"

"It is."

"Beats all these tales we hear about murders in Yankee ships."

"I don't think it beats them. I don't think it resembles them in the least."

"Bless my soul—you don't say so! But of course I've no acquaintance whatever with American ships, not I, so I couldn't go against your knowledge. It's horrible enough for me. . . . But the queerest part is that those fellows seemed to have some idea the man was hidden aboard here. They had really. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"Preposterous—isn't it?"

We were walking to and fro athwart the quarter-deck. No one of the crew forward could be seen (the day was Sunday), and the mate pursued:

"There was some little dispute about it. Our chaps took offense. 'As if we would harbor a thing like that,' they said. 'Wouldn't you like to look for him in our coal-hole?' Quite a tiff. But they made it up in the end. I suppose he did drown himself. Don't you, sir?"

"I don't suppose anything."

"You have no doubt in the matter, sir?"

"None whatever."

I left him suddenly. I felt I was producing a bad impression, but with my double down there it was most trying to be on deck. And it was almost as trying to be below. Altogether a nerve-trying situation. But on the whole I felt less torn in two when I was with him. There was no one in the whole ship whom I dared take into my confidence. Since the hands had got to know his story, it would have been impossible to pass him off for anyone else, and an accidental discovery was to be dreaded now more than ever

The steward being engaged in laying the table for dinner, we could talk only with our eyes when I first went down. Later in the afternoon we had a cautious try at whispering. The Sunday quietness of the ship was against us; the stillness of air and water around her was against us; the elements, the men were against us—everything was against us in our secret partnership; time itself—for this could not go on forever. The very trust in Providence was, I suppose, denied to his guilt. Shall I confess that this thought cast me down very much? And as to the chapter of accidents which counts for so much in the book of success, I could only hope that it was closed. For what favorable accident could be expected?

"Did you hear everything?" were my first words as soon as we took up our position side by side, leaning over my bed place.

He had. And the proof of it was his earnest whisper,

"The man told you he hardly dared to give the order."

I understood the reference to be to that saving foresail.

"Yes. He was afraid of it being lost in the setting."

"I assure you he never gave the order. He may think he did, but he never gave it. He stood there with me on the break of the poop after the main topsail blew away, and whimpered about our last hope— positively whimpered about it and nothing else—and the night coming on! To hear one's skipper go on like that in such weather was enough to drive any fellow out of his mind. It worked me up into a sort of desperation. I just took it into my own hands and went away from him, boiling, and—But what's the use telling you? You know! . . . Do you think that if I had not been pretty fierce with them I should have got the men to do anything? Not It! The bo's'n perhaps? Perhaps! It wasn't a heavy sea—it was a sea gone mad! I suppose the end of the world will be something like that; and a man may have the heart to see it coming once and be done with it—but to have to face it day after day—I don't blame anybody. I was precious little better than the rest. Only—I was an officer of that old coal wagon, anyhow—"

"I quite understand," I conveyed that sincere assurance into his ear. He was out of breath with whispering; I could hear him pant slightly. It was all very simple. The same strung-up force which had given twenty-four men a chance, at least, for their lives, had, in a sort of recoil, crushed an unworthy mutinous existence.

But I had no leisure to weigh the merits of the matter—footsteps in the saloon, a heavy knock. "There's enough wind to get under way with, sir." Here was the call of a new claim upon my thoughts and even upon my feelings.

"Turn the hands up," I cried through the door. "I'll be on deck directly."

I was going out to make the acquaintance of my ship. Before I left the cabin our eyes met—the eyes of the only two strangers on board. I pointed to the recessed part where the little camp-stool awaited him and laid my finger on my lips. He made a gesture—somewhat vague—a little mysterious, accompanied by a faint smile, as if of regret.

This is not the place to enlarge upon the sensations of a man who feels for the first time a ship move under his feet to his own independent word. In my case they were not unalloyed. I was not wholly alone with my command; for there was that stranger in my cabin. Or rather, I was not completely and wholly with her. Part of me was absent. That mental feeling of being in two places at once affected me physically as if the mood of secrecy had penetrated my very soul. Before an hour had elapsed since the ship had begun to move, having occasion to ask the mate (he stood by my side) to take a compass bearing of the pagoda, I caught myself reaching up to his ear in whispers. I say I caught myself, but enough had escaped to startle the man. I can't describe it otherwise than by saying that he shied. A grave, preoccupied manner, as though he were in possession of some perplexing intelligence, did not leave him henceforth. A little later I moved away from the rail to look at the compass with such a stealthy gait that the helmsman noticed it—and I could not help noticing the unusual roundness of his eyes. These are trifling instances, though it's to no commander's advantage to be suspected of ludicrous eccentricities. But I was also more seriously affected. There are to a seaman certain words, gestures, that should in given conditions come as naturally, as instinctively as the winking of a menaced eye. A certain order should spring on to his lips without thinking; a certain sign should get itself made, so to speak, without reflection. But all unconscious alertness had abandoned me. I had to make an effort of will to recall myself back (from the cabin) to the conditions of the moment. I felt that I was appearing an irresolute commander to those people

who were watching me more or less critically.

And, besides, there were the scares. On the second day out, for instance, coming off the deck in the afternoon (I had straw slippers on my bare feet) I stopped at the open pantry door and spoke to the steward. He was doing something there with his back to me. At the sound of my voice he nearly jumped out of his skin, as the saying is, and incidentally broke a cup.

“What on earth’s the matter with you?” I asked, astonished.

He was extremely confused. “Beg your pardon, sir. I made sure you were in your cabin.”

“You see I wasn’t.”

“No, sir. I could have sworn I had heard you moving in there not a moment ago. It’s most extraordinary . . . very sorry, sir.”

I passed on with an inward shudder. I was so identified with my secret double that I did not even mention the fact in those scanty, fearful whispers we exchanged. I suppose he had made some slight noise of some kind or other. It would have been miraculous if he hadn’t at one time or another. And yet, haggard as he appeared, he looked always perfectly self-controlled, more than calm—almost invulnerable. On my suggestion he remained almost entirely in the bath-room, which, upon the whole, was the safest place. There could be really no shadow of an excuse for anyone ever wanting to go in there, once the steward had done with it. It was a very tiny place. Sometimes he reclined on the floor, his legs bent, his head sustained on one elbow. At others I would find him on the camp-stool, sitting in his gray sleeping-suit and with his cropped dark hair like a patient, unmoved convict. At night I would smuggle him into my bed-place, and we would whisper together, with the regular footfalls of the officer of the watch passing and repassing over our heads. It was an infinitely miserable time. It was lucky that some tins of fine preserves were stowed in a locker in my stateroom; hard bread I could always get hold of; and so he lived on stewed chicken, pâté de foie gras, asparagus, cooked oysters, sardines—on all sorts of abominable sham delicacies out of tins. My early morning coffee he always drank; and it was all I dared do for him in that respect.

Every day there was the horrible maneuvering to go through so that my room and then the bathroom should be done in the usual way. I came to hate the sight of the steward, to abhor the voice of that harmless man. I felt that it was he who would bring on the disaster of discovery. It hung like a sword over our heads.

The fourth day out, I think (we were then working down the east side of the Gulf of Siam, tack for tack, in light winds and smooth water)—the fourth day, I say, of this miserable juggling with the unavoidable, as we sat at our evening meal, that man, whose slightest movement I dreaded, after putting down the dishes ran up on deck busily. This could not be dangerous. Presently he came down again; and then it appeared that he had remembered a coat of mine which I had thrown over a rail to dry after having been wetted in a shower which had passed over the ship in the afternoon. Sitting stolidly at the head of the table I became terrified at the sight of the garment on his arm. Of course he made for my door. There was no time to lose.

“Steward,” I thundered. My nerves were so shaken that I could not govern my voice and conceal my agitation. This was the sort of thing that made my terrifically whiskered mate tap his forehead with his forefinger. I had detected him using that gesture while talking on deck with a confidential air to the carpenter. It was too far to hear a word, but I had no doubt that this pantomime could only refer to the strange new captain.

"Yes, sir," the pale-faced steward turned resignedly to me. It was this maddening course of being shouted at, checked without rhyme or reason, arbitrarily chased out of my cabin, suddenly called into it, sent flying out of his pantry on incomprehensible errands, that accounted for the growing wretchedness of his expression.

"Where are you going with that coat?"

"To your room, sir."

"Is there another shower coming?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir. Shall I go up again and see, sir?"

"No! never mind."

My object was attained, as of course my other self in there would have heard everything that passed. During this interlude my two officers never raised their eyes off their respective plates; but the lip of that confounded cub, the second mate, quivered visibly.

I expected the steward to hook my coat on and come out at once. He was very slow about it; but I dominated my nervousness sufficiently not to shout after him. Suddenly I became aware (it could be heard plainly enough) that the fellow for some reason or other was opening the door of the bath-room. It was the end. The place was literally not big enough to swing a cat in. My voice died in my throat and I went stony all over. I expected to hear a yell of surprise and terror, and made a movement, but had not the strength to get on my legs. Everything remained still. Had my second self taken the poor wretch by the throat? I don't know what I could have done next moment if I had not seen the steward come out of my room, close the door, and then stand quietly by the sideboard.

"Saved," I thought. "But, no! Lost! Gone! He was gone!"

I laid my knife and fork down and leaned back in my chair. My head swam. After a while, when sufficiently recovered to speak in a steady voice, I instructed my mate to put the ship round at eight o'clock himself.

"I won't come on deck," I went on. "I think I'll turn in, and unless the wind shifts I don't want to be disturbed before midnight. I feel a bit seedy."

"You did look middling bad a little while ago," the chief mate remarked without showing any great concern.

They both went out, and I stared at the steward clearing the table. There was nothing to be read on that wretched man's face. But why did he avoid my eyes, I asked myself. Then I thought I should like to hear the sound of his voice.

"Steward!"

"Sir!" Startled as usual.

"Where did you hang up that coat?"

"In the bath-room, sir." The usual anxious tone. "It's not quite dry yet, sir."

For some time longer I sat in the cuddy. Had my double vanished as he had come? But of his coming there was an explanation, whereas his disappearance would be inexplicable . . . I went slowly into my dark room, shut the door, lighted the lamp, and for a time dared not turn round. When at last I did I saw him standing bolt-upright in the narrow recessed part. It would not be true to say I had a shock, but an irresistible doubt of his bodily existence flitted through my mind. Can it be, I asked myself, that he is not visible to other eyes than mine? It was like being haunted. Motionless, with a grave face, he raised his hands slightly at me in a gesture which meant clearly, "Heavens! what a narrow escape!" Narrow indeed. I think I had come creeping quietly as near insanity as any man who has not actually gone over the border.

That gesture restrained me, so to speak.

The mate with the terrific whiskers was now putting the ship on the other tack. In the moment of profound silence which follows upon the hands going to their stations I heard on the poop his raised voice: "Hard alee!" and the distant shout of the order repeated on the main-deck. The sails, in that light breeze, made but a faint fluttering noise. It ceased. The ship was coming round slowly: I held my breath in the renewed stillness of expectation; one wouldn't have thought that there was a single living soul on her decks. A sudden brisk shout, "Mainsail haul!" broke the spell, and in the noisy cries and rush overhead of the men running away with the main-brace we two, down in my cabin, came together in our usual position by the bed place.

He did not wait for my question. "I heard him fumbling here and just managed to squat myself down in the bath," he whispered to me. "The fellow only opened the door and put his arm in to hang the coat up. All the same—"

"I never thought of that," I whispered back, even more appalled than before at the closeness of the shave, and marveling at that something unyielding in his character which was carrying him through so finely. There was no agitation in his whisper. Whoever was being driven distracted, it was not he. He was sane. And the proof of his sanity was continued when he took up the whispering again.

"It would never do for me to come to life again."

It was something that a ghost might have said. But what he was alluding to was his old captain's reluctant admission of the theory of suicide. It would obviously serve his turn—if I had understood at all the view which seemed to govern the unalterable purpose of his action.

"You must maroon me as soon as ever you can get amongst these islands off the Cambodge shore," he went on.

"Maroon you! We are not living in a boy's adventure tale," I protested. His scornful whispering took me up.

"We aren't indeed! There's nothing of a boy's tale in this. But there's nothing else for it. I want no more. You don't suppose I am afraid of what can be done to me? Prison or gallows or whatever they may please. But you don't see me coming back to explain such things to an old fellow in a wig and twelve respectable tradesmen, do you? What can they know whether I am guilty or not—or of what I am guilty, either? That's my affair. What does the Bible say? 'Driven off the face of the earth.' Very well, I am off the face of the earth now. As I came at night so I shall go."

"Impossible!" I murmured. "You can't."

"Can't? . . . Not naked like a soul on the Day of Judgment. I shall freeze on to this sleeping suit. The Last Day is not yet—and . . . you have understood thoroughly. Didn't you?"

I felt suddenly ashamed of myself. I may say truly that I understood—and my hesitation in letting that man swim away from my ship's side had been a mere sham sentiment, a sort of cowardice.

"It can't be done now till next night," I breathed out. "The ship is on the off-shore tack and the wind may fail us."

"As long as I know that you understand," he whispered. "But of course you do. It's a great satisfaction to have got somebody to understand. You seem to have been there on purpose." And in the same whisper, as if we two whenever we talked had to say things to each other which were not fit for the world to hear, he added, "It's very wonderful."

We remained side by side talking in our secret way—but sometimes silent or just exchanging a whispered word or two at long intervals. And as usual he stared through the port. A breath of wind came now and again into our faces. The ship might have been moored in dock, so gently and on an even keel she slipped through the water, that did not murmur even at our passage, shadowy and silent like a phantom sea.

At midnight I went on deck, and to my mate's great surprise put the ship round on the other tack. His terrible whiskers flitted round me in silent criticism. I certainly should not have done it if it had been only a question of getting out of that sleepy gulf as quickly as possible. I believe he told the second mate, who relieved him, that it was a great want of judgment. The other only yawned. That intolerable cub shuffled about so sleepily and lolled against the rails in such a slack, improper fashion that I came down on him sharply.

"Aren't you properly awake yet?"

"Yes, sir! I am awake."

"Well, then, be good enough to hold yourself as if you were. And keep a lookout. If there's any current we'll be closing with some islands before daylight."

The east side of the gulf is fringed with islands, some solitary, others in groups. On the blue background of the high coast they seem to float on silvery patches of calm water, arid and gray, or dark green and rounded like clumps of evergreen bushes, with the larger ones, a mile or two long, showing the outlines of ridges, ribs of gray rock under the dark mantle of matted leafage. Unknown to trade, to travel, almost to geography, the manner of life they harbor is an unsolved secret. There must be villages—settlements of fishermen at least—on the largest of them, and some communication with the world is probably kept up by native craft. But all that forenoon, as we headed for them, fanned along by the faintest of breezes, I saw no sign of man or canoe in the field of the telescope I kept on pointing at the scattered group.

At noon I gave no orders for a change of course, and the mate's whiskers became much concerned and seemed to be offering themselves unduly to my notice. At last I said:

"I am going to stand right in. Quite in—as far as I can take her."

The stare of extreme surprise imparted an air of ferocity also to his eyes, and he looked truly terrific for a moment.

"We're not doing well in the middle of the gulf," I continued, casually.

"I am going to look for the land breezes to-night."

"Bless my soul! Do you mean, sir, in the dark amongst the lot of all them islands and reefs and shoals?"

"Well—if there are any regular land breezes at all on this coast one must get close inshore to find them, mustn't one?"

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed again under his breath. All that afternoon he wore a dreamy, contemplative appearance which in him was a mark of perplexity. After dinner I went into my stateroom as if I meant to take some rest. There we two bent our dark heads over a half-unrolled chart lying on my bed.

"There," I said. "It's got to be Koh-ring. I've been looking at it ever since sunrise. It has got two hills and a low point. It must be inhabited. And on the coast opposite there is what looks like the mouth of a biggish river—with some towns, no doubt, not far up. It's the best chance for you that I can see."

"Anything. Koh-ring let it be."

He looked thoughtfully at the chart as if surveying chances and distances from a lofty

height—and following with his eyes his own figure wandering on the blank land of Cochinchina, and then passing off that piece of paper clean out of sight into uncharted regions. And it was as if the ship had two captains to plan her course for her. I had been so worried and restless running up and down that I had not had the patience to dress that day. I had remained in my sleeping-suit, with straw slippers and a soft floppy hat. The closeness of the heat in the gulf had been most oppressive, and the crew were used to seeing me wandering in that airy attire.

“She will clear the south point as she heads now,” I whispered into his ear. “Goodness only knows when, though, but certainly after dark. I’ll edge her in to half a mile, as far as I may be able to judge in the dark—”

“Be careful,” he murmured, warningly—and I realized suddenly that all my future, the only future for which I was fit, would perhaps go irretrievably to pieces in any mishap to my first command.

I could not stop a moment longer in the room. I motioned him to get out of sight and made my way on the poop. That unplayful cub had the watch. I walked up and down for a while thinking things out, then beckoned him over.

“Send a couple of hands to open the two quarter-deck ports,” I said, mildly.

He actually had the impudence, or else so forgot himself in his wonder at such an incomprehensible order, as to repeat:

“Open the quarter-deck ports! What for, sir?”

“The only reason you need concern yourself about is because I tell you to do so. Have them open wide and fastened properly.”

He reddened and went off, but I believe made some jeering remark to the carpenter as to the sensible practice of ventilating a ship’s quarter-deck. I know he popped into the mate’s cabin to impart the fact to him because the whiskers came on deck, as it were by chance, and stole glances at me from below—for signs of lunacy or drunkenness, I suppose.

A little before supper, feeling more restless than ever, I rejoined, for a moment, my second self. And to find him sitting so quietly was surprising, like something against nature, inhuman.

I developed my plan in a hurried whisper.

“I shall stand in as close as I dare and then put her round. I will presently find means to smuggle you out of here into the sail locker, which communicates with the lobby. But there is an opening, a sort of square for hauling the sails out, which gives straight on the quarter-deck and which is never closed in fine weather, so as to give air to the sails. When the ship’s way is deadened in stays and all the hands are aft at the main-braces you will have a clear road to slip out and get overboard through the open quarter-deck port. I’ve had them both fastened up. Use a rope’s end to lower yourself into the water so as to avoid a splash—you know. It could be heard and cause some beastly complication.”

He kept silent for a while, then whispered, “I understand.”

“I won’t be there to see you go,” I began with an effort. “The rest . . . I only hope I have understood, too.”

“You have. From first to last”—and for the first time there seemed to be a faltering, something strained in his whisper. He caught hold of my arm, but the ringing of the supper bell made me start. He didn’t though; he only released his grip.

After supper I didn’t come below again till well past eight o’clock. The faint, steady

breeze was loaded with dew; and the wet, darkened sails held all there was of propelling power in it. The night, clear and starry, sparkled darkly, and the opaque, lightless patches shifting slowly against the low stars were the drifting islets. On the port bow there was a big one more distant and shadowily imposing by the great space of sky it eclipsed.

On opening the door I had a back view of my very own self looking at a chart. He had come out of the recess and was standing near the table.

“Quite dark enough,” I whispered.

He stepped back and leaned against my bed with a level, quiet glance.

I sat on the couch. We had nothing to say to each other. Over our heads the officer of the watch moved here and there. Then I heard him move quickly. I knew what that meant. He was making for the companion; and presently his voice was outside my door.

“We are drawing in pretty fast, sir. Land looks rather close.”

“Very well,” I answered. “I am coming on deck directly.”

I waited till he was gone out of the cuddy, then rose. My double moved too. The time had come to exchange our last whispers, for neither of us was ever to hear each other’s natural voice.

“Look here!” I opened a drawer and took out three sovereigns. “Take this anyhow. I’ve got six and I’d give you the lot, only I must keep a little money to buy some fruit and vegetables for the crew from native boats as we go through Sunda Straits.”

He shook his head.

“Take it,” I urged him, whispering desperately. “No one can tell what—”

He smiled and slapped meaningly the only pocket of the sleeping jacket. It was not safe, certainly. But I produced a large old silk handkerchief of mine, and tying the three pieces of gold in a corner, pressed it on him. He was touched, I supposed, because he took it at last and tied it quickly round his waist under the jacket, on his bare skin.

Our eyes met; several seconds elapsed, till, our glances still mingled, I extended my hand and turned the lamp out. Then I passed through the cuddy, leaving the door of my room wide open. . . . “Steward!”

He was still lingering in the pantry in the greatness of his zeal, giving a rub-up to a plated cruets stand the last thing before going to bed. Being careful not to wake up the mate, whose room was opposite, I spoke in an undertone.

He looked round anxiously. “Sir!”

“Can you get me a little hot water from the galley?”

“I am afraid, sir, the galley fire’s been out for some time now.”

“Go and see.”

He flew up the stairs.

“Now,” I whispered, loudly, into the saloon—too loudly, perhaps, but I was afraid I couldn’t make a sound. He was by my side in an instant—the double captain slipped past the stairs—through a tiny dark passage . . . a sliding door. We were in the sail-locker, scrambling on our knees over the sails. A sudden thought struck me. I saw myself wandering barefooted, bareheaded, the sun beating on my dark poll. I snatched off my floppy hat and tried hurriedly in the dark to ram it on my other self. He dodged and fended off silently. I wonder what he thought had come to me before he understood and suddenly desisted. Our hands met gropingly, lingered united in a steady, motionless clasp for a second. . . . No word was breathed by either of us when they separated.

I was standing quietly by the pantry door when the steward returned.

"Sorry, sir. Kettle barely warm. Shall I light the spirit-lamp?"

"Never mind."

I came out on deck slowly. It was now a matter of conscience to shave the land as close as possible—for now he must go overboard whenever the ship was put in stays. Must! There could be no going back for him. After a moment I walked over to leeward and my heart flew into my mouth at the nearness of the land on the bow. Under any other circumstances I would not have held on a minute longer. The second mate had followed me anxiously.

I looked on till I felt I could command my voice.

"She will weather," I said then in a quiet tone.

"Are you going to try that, sir?" he stammered out incredulously.

I took no notice of him and raised my tone just enough to be heard by the helmsman.

"Keep her good full."

"Good full, sir."

The wind fanned my cheek, the sails slept, the world was silent. The strain of watching the dark loom of the land grow bigger and denser was too much for me. I had shut my eyes—because the ship must go closer. She must! The stillness was intolerable. Were we standing still?

When I opened my eyes the second view started my heart with a thump. The black southern hill of Koh-ring seemed to hang right over the ship like a towering fragment of everlasting night. On that enormous mass of blackness there was not a gleam to be seen, not a sound to be heard. It was gliding irresistibly towards us and yet seemed already within reach of the hand. I saw the vague figures of the watch grouped in the waist, gazing in awed silence.

"Are you going on, sir?" inquired an unsteady voice at my elbow.

I ignored it. I had to go on.

"Keep her full. Don't check her way. That won't do now," I said warningly.

"I can't see the sails very well," the helmsman answered me, in strange, quavering tones.

Was she close enough? Already she was, I won't say in the shadow of the land, but in the very blackness of it, already swallowed up as it were, gone too close to be recalled, gone from me altogether.

"Give the mate a call," I said to the young man who stood at my elbow as still as death. "And turn all hands up."

My tone had a borrowed loudness reverberated from the height of the land. Several voices cried out together: "We are all on deck, sir."

Then stillness again, with the great shadow gliding closer, towering higher, without a light, without a sound. Such a hush had fallen on the ship that she might have been a bark of the dead floating in slowly under the very gate of Erebus.

"My God! Where are we?"

It was the mate moaning at my elbow. He was thunderstruck, and as it were deprived of the moral support of his whiskers. He clapped his hands and absolutely cried out, "Lost!"

"Be quiet," I said, sternly.

He lowered his tone, but I saw the shadowy gesture of his despair. "What are we doing here?"

"Looking for the land wind."

He made as if to tear his hair, and addressed me recklessly.

"She will never get out. You have done it, sir. I knew it'd end in something like this. She

will never weather, and you are too close now to stay. She'll drift ashore before she's round. O my God!"

I caught his arm as he was raising it to batter his poor devoted head, and shook it violently.

"She's ashore already," he wailed, trying to tear himself away.

"Is she? . . . Keep good full there!"

"Good full, sir," cried the helmsman in a frightened, thin, childlike voice.

I hadn't let go the mate's arm and went on shaking it.

"Ready about, do you hear? You go forward"—shake—"and stop there"—shake—"and hold your noise"—shake—"and see these head-sheets properly overhauled"—shake, shake—shake.

And all the time I dared not look towards the land lest my heart should fail me. I released my grip at last and he ran forward as if fleeing for dear life.

I wondered what my double there in the sail-locker thought of this commotion. He was able to hear everything—and perhaps he was able to understand why, on my conscience, it had to be thus close—no less. My first order "Hard alee!" re-echoed ominously under the towering shadow of Koh-ring as if I had shouted in a mountain gorge. And then I watched the land intently. In that smooth water and light wind it was impossible to feel the ship coming-to. No! I could not feel her. And my second self was making now ready to ship out and lower himself overboard. Perhaps he was gone already . . . ?

The great black mass brooding over our very mastheads began to pivot away from the ship's side silently. And now I forgot the secret stranger ready to depart, and remembered only that I was a total stranger to the ship. I did not know her. Would she do it? How was she to be handled?

I swung the mainyard and waited helplessly. She was perhaps stopped, and her very fate hung in the balance, with the black mass of Koh-ring like the gate of the everlasting night towering over her taffrail. What would she do now? Had she way on her yet? I stepped to the side swiftly, and on the shadowy water I could see nothing except a faint phosphorescent flash revealing the glassy smoothness of the sleeping surface. It was impossible to tell—and I had not learned yet the feel of my ship. Was she moving? What I needed was something easily seen, a piece of paper, which I could throw overboard and watch. I had nothing on me. To run down for it I didn't dare. There was no time. All at once my strained, yearning stare distinguished a white object floating within a yard of the ship's side. White on the black water. A phosphorescent flash passed under it. What was that thing? . . . I recognized my own floppy hat. It must have fallen off his head . . . and he didn't bother. Now I had what I wanted—the saving mark for my eyes. But I hardly thought of my other self, now gone from the ship, to be hidden forever from all friendly faces, to be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, with no brand of the curse on his sane forehead to stay a slaying hand . . . too proud to explain.

And I watched the hat—the expression of my sudden pity for his mere flesh. It had been meant to save his homeless head from the dangers of the sun. And now—behold—it was saving the ship, by serving me for a mark to help out the ignorance of my strangeness. Ha! It was drifting forward, warning me just in time that the ship had gathered sternaway.

"Shift the helm," I said in a low voice to the seaman standing still like a statue.

The man's eyes glistened wildly in the binnacle light as he jumped round to the other side and spun round the wheel.

I walked to the break of the poop. On the over-shadowed deck all hands stood by the forebraces waiting for my order. The stars ahead seemed to be gliding from right to left. And all was so still in the world that I heard the quiet remark, “She’s round,” passed in a tone of intense relief between two seamen.

“Let go and haul.”

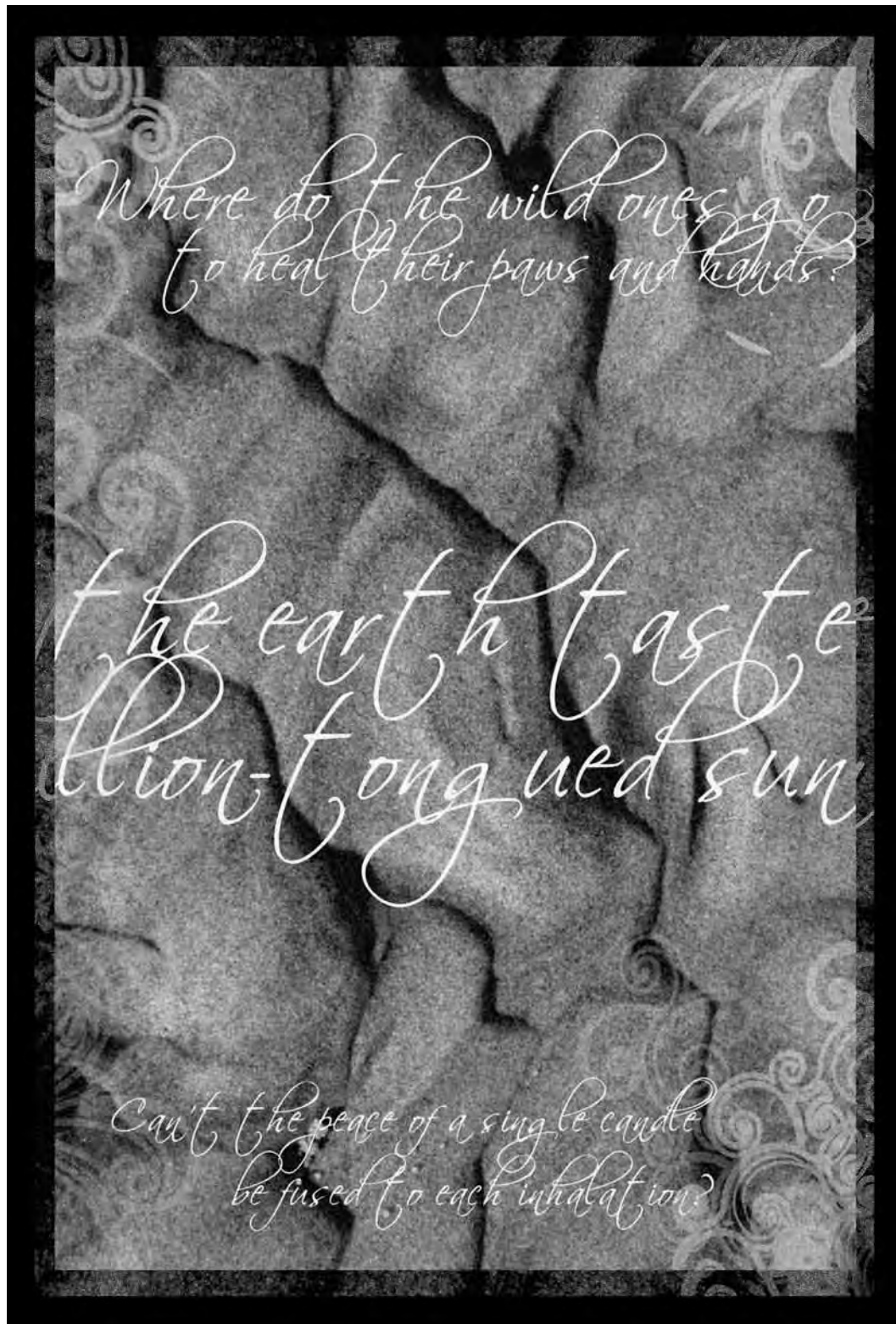
The foreyards ran round with a great noise, amidst cheery cries. And now the frightful whiskers made themselves heard giving various orders. Already the ship was drawing ahead. And I was alone with her. Nothing! no one in the world should stand now between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command.

Walking to the taffrail, I was in time to make out, on the very edge of a darkness thrown by a towering black mass like the very gateway of Erebus—yes, I was in time to catch an evanescent glimpse of my white hat left behind to mark the spot where the secret sharer of my cabin and of my thoughts, as though he were my second self, had lowered himself into the water to take his punishment: a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny.

* * * * *







Ric Amante

A Lunar Questionnaire

Where do the wild ones go
 to heal their paws and hands?
 Can God be both host and guest
 at this never-ending shindig?
 When will the maze-dwellers matriculate?
 Why is the salt of compassion
 so often added late?
 Pick one—back, head, or heart ache.
 Isn't it about time to
 rejoice in the sensory encryption?
 In the physics of love,
 is the shortest distance
 a look in the eye?
 Have you seen grace lately—
 what was she wearing under her bones?
 Will the blue veins beneath the skin
 form a link to constellations?
 How much does it cost
 to park the bus
 as far from the hypocrisy
 as possible?
 If the wonder ever leaves,
 will you find that also wondrous?
 Does the shattering of habit
 plant seeds amidst the rubble?
 At which address did glory
 ever fail to show?
 Animal, vegetable, or meteor?
 Wherefrom issue the fires of renewal
 if not in today's first earful?
 Is the time spent waiting
 in need of finer calibration?
 What does the earth taste like
 to the trillion-tongued sun?
 Why does your psyche taste like cinnamon?
 What's the deal with a leader
 with no ladder to the rooftop?
 How goes it with the sloughing of
 yesterday's cramps and groans?
 Can't the peace of a single candle
 be fused to each inhalation?



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes From the Northwest

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), and resumed after a long absence in issue 59 (October 2006). It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

“Fish, amphibian, and reptile, warm-blooded bird and mammal—each of us carries in our veins a salty stream in which the elements sodium, potassium, and calcium are combined in almost the same proportions as in sea water. This is our inheritance from the day, untold millions of years ago, when a remote ancestor, having progressed from the one-celled to the many-celled stage, first developed a circulatory system in which the fluid was merely water of the sea.”

—Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*, (1950, 1951, 1961)

http://scriptorpress.yage.net/BM55_2008_carson.pdf

Begin these notes with the ocean, a moment, an hour, a day by its side. KD is taking pictures, I am sitting on a log of driftwood near the water's edge writing. It is a high day, for many reasons, neither of us have been to the ocean in years, never together. We've gotten a hotel room near Tillamook, Oregon, home of a famous dairy factory (cheese, milk, ice cream). This day, Halloween perchance, we packed our bag of food, cameras, & notebooks, & came down to the water.

Chilly, but no rain. Dogs & humans roam the shore familiarly, many we guess from the fancy houses on the hilltop behind us. Oregon's Pacific shores are free to all. A right, a mercy.

Primal, all this. The herons & gulls flying by, the driftwood & kelp drying on sand, sun, the clouds. Confronting the ocean simplifies things. Here is mystery made visible. Here is power. Here is beauty. Here too is vulnerability, the finite limits of the planet's epic reserves to support life.

It takes me a long time to really settle. Our sandwiches taste soggy. I take turns with KD snapping pictures. We walk & walk some more. Finally I sit, I listen. A rhythmic music, the sound of this wet world breathing, visible evidence of how alive the earth itself is, & how a body as far away as the moon exerts affect.

I wonder: is all of this proof of God's hand or the shape of that hand itself? In truth I find I need no proof nor does the idea of God interest me. Whatever all of this is, where from, where bound, here it is, now. The fact of this world, whatever larger thing it beds in, whatever clock or rules it may operate by, the challenge is to shape one's faith complementary to one's questions, so each may breathe & flourish like this shore.

I write & write because I came here to open my pores wider than in awhile. When the light begins to leave, KD & I return to the view-deck near our hotel. We take pictures, especially of a large heron standing unmoving in a puddle a ways from the sea itself as the tide recedes. The trick seems to be to clasp hands tightly with & live by the idea that “our home” counts for herons & humans & kelp & driftwood & all the rest a like. Oh what a trick!

We watch the sunset as its calliope of colors breaks & re-makes our hearts. Not just the moon & its gravity, but the sun & its heat electrifying this world with life. The mysteries stretch ever outward, one affecting another, each many, many all, one in many in all, the hungry eye, the questing soul looks upward & does not see dead stars but live light, every night its arriving message, its reassurance that there is enough room in this universe & however many others for each to look deeper & deeper in & then turn, by hope or despair or both, outward, a single animate mite on a noisy little rock, but also more, so much more, ever more, & still ever more.

Without answers, not an hour’s or even a minute’s certainty gained by our experiences, we nonetheless retreat to our motel room as two of the blessed, bearing high gifts that urge play, work, gratefulness, love, a proofless trust to keep breathing.

“Keep your feet on the ground
& keep reaching for the stars”
—Casey Kasem, “American Top 40”

When I was young, I listened to AM radio, especially to Casey Kasem’s “American Top 40” program. Every Sunday from about 1976, & for about 20 years, I’d write down on my clipboard the 40 most popular songs in the U.S., according to *Billboard* magazine. Rock, soul, dance, country, college rap—most of popular music showed up on this program. Popular meant sales, not quality. But popular meant variety, too, & I’d like to think I heard more kinds of music than I would have otherwise (Led Zeppelin, Donna Summer, Barry Manilow, U2, Billy Joel, Madonna). Casey Kasem had a kind of old-fashioned folkiness to him, a plain-folks humor. Radio personalities nowadays are more often pimping some flavor of politics. Times change, which is fine, but I’m grateful I was around for a bit of radio’s golden times.

I liked the idea of being a radio DJ, hosting a radio program, & in college I got my chance. WFCS-FM at Central Connecticut State University. First I did a news spot, ripping headlines from an AP news wire teletype machine (this was 1989, pre-Internet), & eventually getting a music show my own. Half my selections had to be from the albums in the college radio charts (bands like The Cure, XTC, The Church, Talking Heads, R.E.M., Sonic Youth); the other half I would choose. Often that other half reflected music I’d heard on Casey Kasem’s show. Some at the station didn’t like this, disdained all popular music on some sort of obscure principle. Strangely, I had to head deeper underground than college radio to find the freedom I was looking for.

A decade later, January 1999, I lucked into Radio Free Cambridge at an art gallery not far from Harvard University. A pirate 100 watt FM radio station in a tiny room in the back, RFC was commercial-free, & rules- & censorship-free. My show was & is still called “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution” (<http://www.scriptorpress.com/withinswithin.html>) I don’t guess I was playing much Top 40 music by this time—more psychedelic rock (Pink

Floyd, Grateful Dead, Beatles, Phish, etc.) plus reading poetry & acid texts. In 2000, the FCC shut the station down because of a complaint from a 20,000 watt commercial station on the dial (yah). I moved onto the semi-legit Allston-Brighton Free Radio, broadcasting on low-power AM radio. My stint there lasted about two years, til I left the Boston/Cambridge area in 2002.

I didn't return to radio until November 2003 & this time it was Internet radio, SpiritPlants Radio (<http://spfradio.yage.net>). Internet radio requires a computer either to broadcast or listen, as well as an Internet connection. Six years hence, it is a more common medium than it was back then. The technology has much improved. SpiritPlants Radio is where I have arrived some 30-plus years after first tuning in to Casey Kasem's countdown.

It was November 2008 that I decided to take over running the station. At that point, it had been all but abandoned by DJs coming & going. My three-hour show was on every Saturday afternoon, & that was it. The rest of the week the radio stream was offline.

I thought about all I had learned about radio, listening & DJing over the years, & decided to simply start with what content I could find. Comedy albums. Live rock albums. News shows. Eventually I worked in podcasts found online ("Notes from the Psychedelic Salon," "In the Groove: Jazz & Beyond," "Grateful Dead Listening Guide"). What made me happiest, however, was when I met people online & in person who wanted to DJ shows (shows such as DJ Zart's "Radiohuasca," DJ Catfishrivers' "The River's Edge," DJ Arkstar's "Under Eternity Blue," and DJ Senz's "The Lavender Dancer").

SpiritPlants Radio for me traces weirdly back through the pirate stations, college radio to Casey Kasem. Its variety of content & shows & music, its freedom for DJs to create the shows as they will, its non-commercial basis . . . these are an amalgam of the possibilities of radio. I often work with DJs who have never DJ'd a show, & I show them how (what's needed, essentially, is a playlist of audio content & a microphone), & they easily cross from listener to maker. It's a lot of work for me, to maintain and update the radio's website, post a weekly schedule, advertise the weekend schedule of shows, & still allow time for creating my own weekly show.

But I have not & do not do it alone. I was one of six DJs with shows on the station during its November 21-22, 2009 6th anniversary weekend. A total of ten hours of homegrown content (there is also third-party content such as jazz, news, rock concerts and psychedelic lectures). The week including that weekend saw over 300 people tune into the radio.

SpiritPlants Radio is associated with Scriptor Press though only my show is a Scriptor Press project. This means I don't own the whole of the mean of production. My work focuses on the weekend; others run the weekday stream. It could go away though I don't think it will. Like all the other projects I work on, it is a collaboration. This is what gives me most satisfaction regarding it. That I grew up not to be just like Casey Kasem but to teach & enable others to create & host their shows too. Anyone can, with the tools, a bit of knowledge, a willingness to put in the work. Write to me at spiritplantsradio@gmail.com if you'd like to try.

Happy Anniversary, SpiritPlants Radio.

And my affection & thanks to you, Mr. Kasem.



What good films like *Paranormal Activity* & *Fourth Kind* tap, aesthetically, is the deep-seated human fear of, & curiosity toward the other. In both of these films—the former about demonic possession, the latter about alien abduction—individuals are malevolently trespassed. This trespass, even worse, seems random. Like being poached from a herd, without the explanation the human mind craves: the *why?* acknowledged & answered.

Neither film explains. The demon in *Paranormal Activity* that plays with Katie throughout her life, before taking full possession, never says why her. Likewise, Dr. Tyler's daughter Ashley in *Fourth Kind* is taken & never returned. The funny thing in critical reaction to films like these is not surprise in what they depict but debate over how convincing the depiction. It is agreed: Life is about trespass.

Life's not fair. Shit, shafts of gold, mediocrity. Both reward & suffering—sometimes earned, sometimes not. One can't "save" the world but for patches, better hours. Sometimes the rules are clear—sometimes not—sometimes followed—bent, broken—changed slowly, suddenly. There is constant movement if not change, movement & change being imprecisely similar.

So the impulse to ask *why?* is followed by a desire to explain. The human mind uses tools to try & cohere its world. Observe the natural world, the world of men, the inner workings of mind in thought & dream. And what result? Books, libraries of them. Churches. Civilizations. Empires. Human structures large & small intended to face the world's fermenting chaos, give it a name, reckon its process, & assess how to best make one's way through the world's tangle.

Thing is: roots & vines are always coming over, under, & through the perceptual walls one erects. Truer is that the roots & vines begin & terminate on both sides of the wall. The wall is a mortal individual's struggle to deduce the relational nature of me & the world. Trespass runs all ways.

In the case of these two movies & their conflicts, the explanations given are demons & aliens, both conceptualizations with long familiar histories. Tones & tones of embodied trespass, named, catalogued, explained. The *why?* impulse, the *why?* hunger.

And here's the thing: we *don't* know why, as individuals or as a living kind. Sometimes one of us convinces to know, is full of a passion *like* knowing, & this knowing may become institutionalized, and grow to encompass far more than the original knower imagined or intended. Killing in a god's name is rarely an idea attributable to the great prophets. More to some of the keepers of the bureaucracy built in stone & blood around a prophet's name.

What humans drive to answer are three difficult questions:

1. *Why am I here in this form now?*
2. *What do I do?*
3. *What happens next?*

What these questions point toward is perhaps an even more fundamental one: *what is human nature?* Stated in variation: *Are we here as God's stewards of the world? Are we gods ourselves, waiting to know this? Are we the results of the mysteries of evolution, which itself is the creating force? Where are we bound?*

I believe that our responses to not knowing the fundamental *why?* of human nature, or the world, or the universe, show our best & worst in action. Wars, slavery, institutionalized structures of loathing for a rationalized "other" (whether nature or another religion or skin tone, or aliens, or demons) reveal humans over & over to be driven to harness what is terrifying—attempt to control, to master.

The best of us manifests as art. This is what I come back to over & over. When *why?* inspires music, poetry, or films like these—grappling with the other, the other's trespass, the way explanations fall impotent to a face in terror—or ecstasy—I believe we near something better than explanation. If the map has no definable borders, then anything is possible. *Anything is possible.*

I think the catch, or challenge, is this: *what to do? What to make? How to fill the hours & the years? And what to do about the aliens & demons out there?* They are coming over the wall all the time. They are already here. Sometimes they are a kind of other. Sometimes they are us. The biggest, happiest question of all: *what to make next?* I believe that as dark, as terrifying, as trespassing as the world can be, we must continue to *make next.*



“The keeper of the values [of his culture] is the one person who knows that the values are bullshit . . . The shaman at the top realizes that, my god we stare out onto an abyss. We do not know.”

—Terence McKenna, “Appreciating Imagination” Lecture, 1997.

The struggle within the broad psychedelic community is similar to that of any controversial minority: how to define & maintain a valid, yet fluid identity when so many internal & external pressures exist? The external ones range from threat of incarceration to prejudiced public opinion to simple widespread ignorance. I think of how women, blacks, gays, Wiccans, & many other minority groups have suffered centuries of persecution in the inch-by-inch struggle to achieve validation & respect. Jails & graves are both full of what a given time & place deemed the “other” which must be caged or destroyed for the sake of a somewhat illusory homogenous larger population.

Recently we’ve witnessed the burgeoning medical marijuana movement, as state after state has passed “medical marijuana laws” to aid those who suffer chronic pain & cancer [see, for example, “U.S. Won’t Prosecute in States That Allow Medical Marijuana,” by David Stout and Solomon Moore, *New York Times*, October 19, 2009]. Then there has been the legally sanctioned return to the laboratory of experimentation with LSD, psilocybin, & the like—again, one of the chief reasons being pain, in this case that of cluster headache sufferers [see “Response of cluster headache to psilocybin and LSD,” by R. Andrew Sewell, MD, John H. Halpern, MD, and Harrison G. Pope, Jr., MD, *Neurology*, 2006, 66:1920-1922].

These are heartening trends yet they may or many not prove successful in bridging the acceptance gap from psychedelic culture to mainstream culture. They narrowly treat marijuana & psychedelics as valuable medicines for bodily pain; what they don’t start by is legitimizing these substances as *mind medicines*, *mind accelerants*. Neither marijuana nor psychedelics are simply “super-aspirins” which are somehow otherwise the stuff of zombie addicts. Psychedelics have a long, world-reaching, cultural and spiritual history—including a significant time not long ago in the U.S. & the West—which is as of yet not currently acknowledged. And the psychedelic nature of Western art is profound—yet its public discussion is completely missing.



Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 70 | October 2009. Ric is currently working on a private edition of his selected poetrys, expected in 2010.

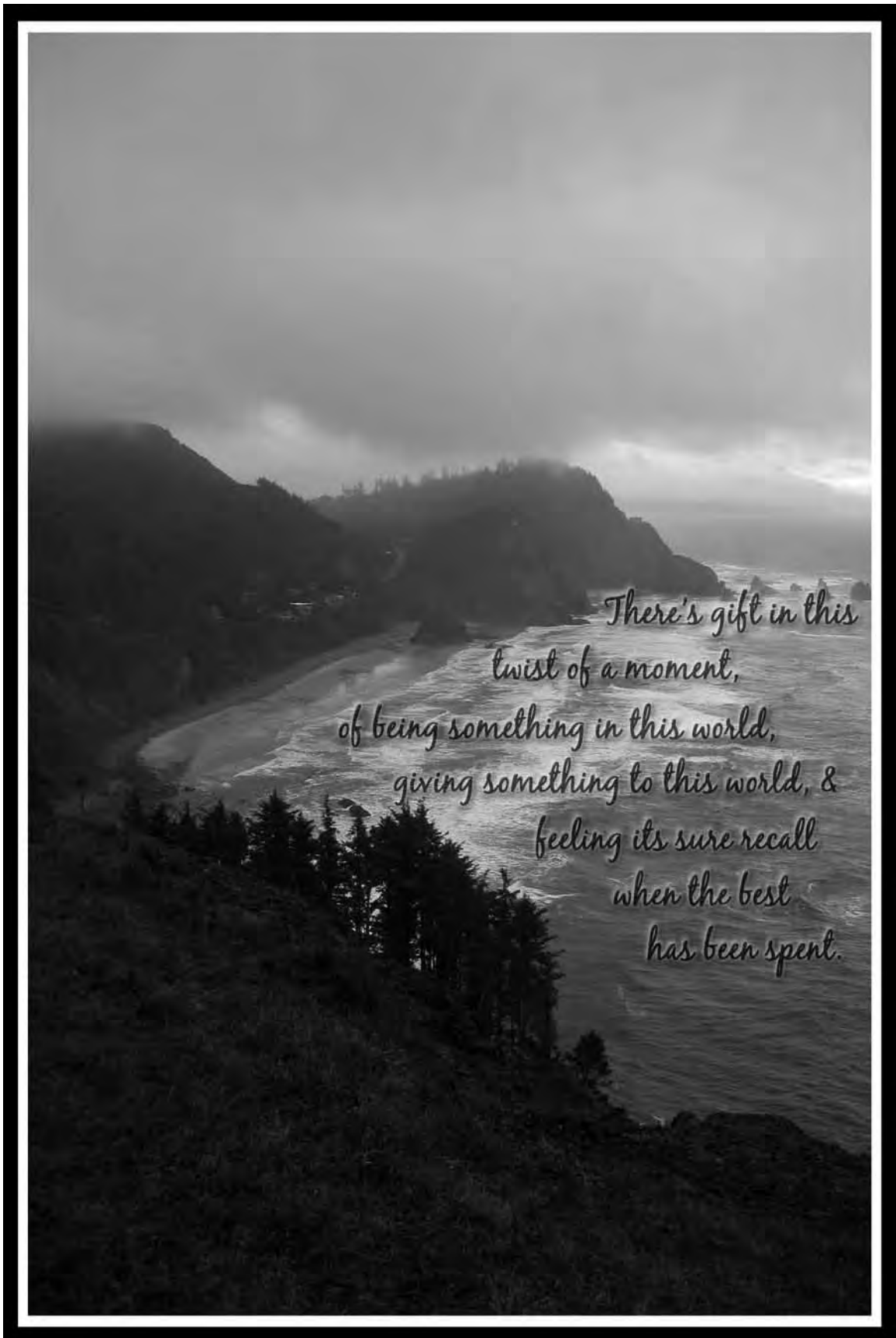
Joseph Conrad was born in Berdyczów (now Berdychiv, Ukraine) in 1857, & died in England in 1924. He authored many great novels, including *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, & *Secret Agent*. His classic story “Secret Sharer” was published by Scriptor Press as one of the 2009 Burning Man Books.

Christopher Patrick Gose lives in Bodega Bay, California. This issue’s section of his “World’s Window” ayahuasca journal concludes the work serialized in the three previous numbers of *The Cenacle*. *It is finished, my friend.*

Judh Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle* | 68 | April 2009. Kassandra & I agree that her haiku in the current issue is some of her best work to date.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Portland, Oregon. Many of the photographs in this issue were taken by her brilliant eye during our trip to the Oregon coast at the end of October.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Portland, Oregon. I am bidding 2009 an affectionate goodbye. Some years a rough ride with no fruit to show. I think 2009’s hard times & many efforts may prove otherwise in time.



There's gift in this
twist of a moment,
of being something in this world,
giving something to this world, &
feeling its sure recall
when the best
has been spent.

